

MISOGYNY IN URBAN FICTION: A STUDY OF SELECTED TEXTS BY

MEJA MWANGI

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or any other award.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear parents; Papa and Mama: Professor Martin N. Etyang and Christine N. Etyang.

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ABSTRACT

The study is an investigation of the theme of misogyny as propagated by the urban underclass represented in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi. The study argues that over the years, literary critics have unjustly classified the urban fiction of Mwangi as “non- serious” literature, and have therefore accorded him little if any critical acclaim albeit his fiction deals with very intricate and vital modern-day social problems in Kenya. The study argues that misogyny has directly and indirectly affected the social, economic, political and psychological lives of women represented in the text under study. These and other social problems constitute the bulk of themes found in the urban fiction of Mwangi. In Chapter Two, the study examined the social-economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women represented in the fiction of Meja Mwangi. In Chapter Three, the study critically examined the images of women focusing on the character roles and types assigned to them. The study then shifted focus in Chapter Four to the identification of actual prototypes of misogyny and a discussion on the bearing they had on his social vision for women as a writer of African fiction. Chapter Five summarized the analytical aspects of all the chapters and drew conclusions as well as offered recommendations for future tasks. The study employed the Masculinist Literary Theory and Feminist Literary Theory in its analysis. The theories used in an interwoven manner enabled a sufficient analysis of the various aspects of gender injustice propagated through misogyny. It also actualized the re-reading of the texts from a different standpoint. This in turn enabled the identification and later discussion of the various facets of misogyny employed in the primary texts under study. The research concluded that Meja Mwangi has a positive social vision for women. A comprehensive qualitative study has been conducted, mainly through library research, and a close examination of primary and secondary texts. Internet resources constituting online journal articles have been consulted in conducting this research.

Operational Definition of Terms

Mwangin Man: The term denotes the male characters in Mwangi's fiction. They include; Meja and Maina in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), Ben Wachira and Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* (1976), and Dusman and Toto in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). Angus Calder (1987) had coined a similar term; Mwangian Man to refer to the main characters in Mwangi's urban texts. He describes them as being intelligent, usually well educated, cynical and disillusioned.

Amazon woman: A tall, big-bodied, aggressive and strong-willed woman.

Urban underclass: Refers to the characters in the primary texts of the study that are living under poor conditions in urban areas and are least privileged in terms of opportunities such as employment and education.

Popular Literature: Genre of fiction that burst onto the Kenyan literary scene in the 1970s. Fiction in this category usually has simple plots and shallow characters. They are mainly intended for the masses and appeal to wider, general readership as opposed to works of fiction strictly intended for scholarly criticism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
Operational Definition of Terms	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.1.1 The Author’s Profile	5
1.2 Statement of the Problem.	8
1.3 Research Questions	9
1.4 Research Assumptions	9
1.5 Objectives of the Study	9
1.6 Justification of the Study	10
1.7 The Scope and Delimitations of the Study	11
1.8 Theoretical Framework	11
1.9 Literature Review	17
1.9.1 Literature on Misogyny	18
1.9.2 Literature Review on Meja Mwangi’s Fiction.	20
1.10 Research Methodology	28
CHAPTER TWO	30
THE IMPACT OF MISOGYNY ON WOMEN CHARACTERS IN <i>KILL ME QUICK</i> (1973)	30
2.2 Women Characters in <i>Kill Me Quick</i> (1973)	32
2.2.1 Sara	32
2.2.2 Delilah	34

2.2.3 Biblical Allusion _____	38
2.2.4 The Women of Cedar Avenue _____	38
2.3 Social Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in <i>Kill Me Quick</i> (1973) _____	39
2.4 Economic Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in <i>Kill Me Quick</i> (1973) _____	43
2.5 Psychological and Political Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in <i>Kill Me Quick</i> (1973) _____	43
CHAPTER THREE _____	48
THE DEPICTION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN <i>GOING DOWN RIVER ROAD</i> (1976) BY MEJA MWANGI _____	48
3.1 Introduction _____	48
3.1.2 Conceptualizing Women Characters in the Text _____	50
3.2 Mwangi's Female Characters _____	53
3.3 Wini _____	54
3.4 Susan _____	59
3.5 Prostitutes _____	61
3.6 Ocholla's wives _____	62
3.8 Conclusion _____	76
CHAPTER FOUR _____	77
THE BEARING THAT MISOGYNY HAS ON MEJA MWANGI'S SOCIAL VISION FOR WOMEN _____	77
4.1 Introduction _____	77
4.2 The Portrayal of Women in <i>The Cockroach Dance</i> (1979) _____	79
4.2.1 Dacca House Housemaid _____	80
4.2.2 Bathroom Man's Wife _____	81
4.2.3 Amazon Women _____	82
4.3 Meja Mwangi's Social Vision for Women _____	84
4.4 Depiction Of Women In <i>Rafiki Man Guitar</i> (2013) _____	88
4.5 Conclusion _____	91

CHAPTER FIVE	93
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	93
5.1 Introduction	93
5.2 Research Findings	93
5.2.1 Chapter One	93
5.2.2 Chapter Two	96
5.2.3 Chapter Three	96
5.2.4 Chapter Four	97
5.3 Recommendations for Future Tasks	98
Notes	100
WORKS CITED	101
APENDIX I	107
PHOTO OF MEJA MWANGI	107

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING MISOGYNY

1.1 Background to the Study

The term misogyny originates from the ancient Greek terms *misien-* which means to hate and *gune-*women. The fiction under study examines the misogynistic attitude in the male characters, geared at hating women the reader interacts with. The Mwangin Man expresses misogyny in various ways such as violence against women, sexual denigration and sexual objectification. Michael Flood (2007) defines misogyny as the hatred of women. He further postulates that it is common in men but it also exists and it is practised by women against other women.

Early traces of misogyny in literature have been traced in ancient Greek mythologies which are credited to a Greek writer Hesoid, and are dated in 532 B.C, effectively making it one of the oldest forms of prejudices in literature. Other forms of racial and religious prejudice also exist. John Willoby Roberts (1998:22) notes that the misogynistic tradition in Greek literature is older than tragedy and comedy which are dated between 550BC and 220 BC.

Margaret J. Rinck (1990:83) asserts that rapists, wife batterers and others who propagate violence against women are typically seen as classic examples of men who hate women. Yet there are other examples of men who do not fit in this

dramatic category but have a deep hatred for women. Their weapons are not physical, but rather mental and emotional: their hatred is therefore expressed much more subtly. The Mwangin Man is a classic example of a man who express misogyny through subtle means, although he occasionally demonstrate violent behaviour towards women.

Urban poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The urban poor live with many daily deprivations such as limited access to employment opportunities and income, inadequate and insecure housing and services, violent and unhealthy environments, little or no social protection mechanisms, limited access to adequate health and education opportunities. The Mwangin Man thrives in these harsh and challenging conditions and is quite at home in the slums. The urban slum is his natural habitat as he cannot afford decent living conditions in the city. Ben in *Going Down River Road* (1976: 135) notes that “Good old *Karara*¹ Centre was stuffy as hell yet warm as home.” Urban poverty is not just a collection of characteristics but it is also a dynamic condition of vulnerability or susceptibility to risks.

Lars Johansson (1992:15) observes that Mwangi’s urban novels are the most interesting because they display competing discourses. He goes on to state that latter day urban novels deal with the social problems that Mwangi tackles but his tales of city life stick out above the rest.

Samantha Morgan Curtis (2007:444) posits that Western cultures, in particular, have legitimized and institutionalized the hatred of women by justifying women's lower position through religious doctrine, by blaming the biblical Mother Eve, as the Pandora who introduced sin and evil into the world. This demeanor has been used to justify the mistreatment of women. The pain of menstruation and childbirth, are seen as God's judgment on Eve's daughters; women (443).

According to Curtis (2007:443), misogyny has historically been justified and it has arisen from women's indispensable roles, which are limited to child bearing and other domestic duties. Women characters in the texts under study have been subjected to misogyny which has at times been occasioned by their essential roles of child-bearing. Susan a character in one of the texts under study; *Going Down River Road* (1976) for example is on the receiving end after Ben, discovers that she is a lactating mother of a one-month-old baby. This discovery heightens his misogyny to the point that he becomes violent towards women characters in the society represented in the fiction. Wini in the same text is abandoned by her boyfriend after she it is discovered she is pregnant. Delilah in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), expresses her desire to get married to Maina and start a family. Maina is quick to extinguish her dream as a non-starter. It would appear that misogyny in male characters in the fiction under study is heightened by women's essential role of child bearing.

Popular literature is a literary mode that emerged on the Kenyan literary scene in the 1970s and ever since it has continuously received criticism widely as critics claim it lacks seriousness in addressing important themes such as immorality. Critics such as Chris Wanjala have gone on record stating that popular literature was ‘pornographic’ and ‘immoral’ especially in the way it portrayed sexual images using profanities and misrepresentation of women as objects of sexual desire by men. Chris Wanjala (1980:135) describes popular literature as being “trashy”. He further notes that popular literature is “a scabrous imitation of brothel and low life, especially yarned for the low-brow reader in this country. It portrays the depraved scenes of sex, the dilemma of the prostitute, and the cancer of unemployment.”

Despite the negative criticism from various quarters, these texts have indeed proven to be popular. Publishing houses in the 1970s, after the publication of *Son of a Woman* (1971) by Charles Mangua, began a special series (Spear Books) to handle works of popular literature. Meja Mwangi’s trilogy of urban novels: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) all written in the 70s distinguished him as a creative writer of popular literature. Okot p’Bitek, particularly in *Song of Prisoner* (1971) and *Song of Malaya* (1972) respectively, David Mailu and Charles Mangua from Kenya among others, are other such writers of popular literature.

Roger Kurtz (1998:232) notes that women in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi are portrayed as being abominable. The role of almost every Mwangian female is the object of male desire. “Women like cars and guns have little importance except as signifiers of male potency and control. They are all discarded unceremoniously or even brutally.”

1.1.1 The Author’s Profile

Meja Mwangi is a leading Kenyan novelist who was born on the 27th of December 1948 in Nanyuki, Kenya. He has worked extensively in the film industry, including: screenwriting, assistant directing, casting and location management. Mwangi schooled at Nanyuki Secondary School before proceeding for his “A” Levels to the then Kenyatta College (now Kenyatta University) and much later to University of Leeds (England). Mwangi’s fiction is representative of the entire range of narrative fiction in Kenya’s written literary tradition.

Kurtz (1998) says that Mwangi has always been unusual among Kenyan writers in that he did not emerge from the university community. Mwangi did not go beyond two years of study at Kenyatta College. He divides Mwangi’s work into three main categories. The first are his Mau Mau novels which comprise of *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975). The second category is the thrillers which include *The Bushtrackers* (1979). The third category consists of his city novels. Mwangi’s urban trilogy-*Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), a compelling and innovative set of

texts dealing with what is arguably the most pressing contemporary social problem in Kenya.

Given the historical and social significance of the Mau Mau movements' struggle for independence, many writers especially from Central Kenya, who joined the literary scene before Mwangi, wrote about the experience. They include: Charles Mangua, Godwin Wachira and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Colonial writers like Robert Ruark and Elspeth Huxley also wrote about the Mau Mau experience in Kenya before independence.

Meja Mwangi has written adult literature, children's literature and some of these works have won several literary awards which have led to his fame at both local and international levels. It is worth noting that he is the only writer in the country to have won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature a record six times in different categories.

Some of the prizes and awards include: the Jomo Kenyatta Prize of 1974 and 1977 for *Kill Me Quick* (1973) and *Going Down River Road* (1976) respectively, the 1978 Lotus Award (Afro-Asian Writers' Association), the Noma Award (honourable mention), for *Bread of Sorrow* (1989), the 1992, German Youth Literature Prize, for *Little White Man* (1990), the 2001 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for *The Last Plague* (2000), the 2001 National Book Week Award (Kenya) for *The Last Plague* (2000), Nominated for the 2002 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, for *The Last Plague* (2000), the 2005 Society of School Librarians

International Honor Book Award (USA), for *The Mzungu Boy* (2005), the 2006 American Library Association National Book for Children Award, for *The Mzungu Boy* (2005) and the Children's 2006 Africana Book Award for the same book. Other literary works by Meja Mwangi include;

- *Taste of Death* (1975)
- *The Bushtrackers* (1979)
- *Bread of Sorrow* (1987)
- *The Return of Shaka* (1989)
- *Weapon of Hunger* (1989)
- *Striving for the Wind* (1990)
- *The Last Plague* (2000)
- *Mountain of Bones* (2001)
- *The Boy Gift* (2006) *Mama Dudu, the Insect Woman* (2007)
- *Baba Pesa* (2007)
- *The Big Chiefs* (2007)
- *Gun Runner* (2007)
- *Power* (2009)

- *Blood Brothers* (2009)
- *Rafiki Man Guitar* (2013)

1.2 Statement of the Problem.

In the 1970s, Meja Mwangi began writing texts that fit the category of popular literature. To many of his critics, these texts lacked the critical edge that marked his earlier works. Chris Wanjala (1980) argues that popular literature is trashy and “a scabrous imitation of brothel and low life, especially yarned for the low-brow reader in this country. However, Kurtz (1994) argues that it is in the popular novels that Mwangi’s cinematic vision comes to the fore as well as being among the most creative and most consistently well written books in the category. The Mwangin Man in the trilogy under study, has instinctively developed a misogynistic attitude towards women. He has evolved from despising women in *Kill Me Quick* (1973) to full blown misogyny in *Going Down River Road* (1976). In *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), Meja Mwangi introduces the Amazon woman who thrives in society as she is assertive and aggressive and wards off misogyny perpetrated by Mwangi’s male characters. Her introduction portrays the author’s positive social vision for women. This manifestation in Meja Mwangi’s fiction is what forms the backbone of this study.

1.3 Research Questions

- (a) How does misogyny impact on the social, economic, political and psychological lives of the women folk represented in the texts under study?
- (b) How have women been represented in the urban fiction under study?
- (c) What bearing does misogyny seem to have on the author's social vision?

1.4 Research Assumptions

- (a) Women in the texts under study have been socially, economically, politically and psychologically affected by misogyny.
- (b) Women have been negatively represented in the urban fiction under study.
- (c) Misogyny has blurred the author's social vision leading to contentious images of women in the selected works under study.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

- (a) To investigate and discuss the social, economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women in the selected urban fiction.
- (b) To critically analyze how women have been depicted and to identify specific examples of misogyny in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi.
- (c) To discuss the bearing misogyny has on Meja Mwangi's social vision for women as a prolific writer of African fiction.

1.6 Justification of the Study

There exists a paucity of critical studies on Meja Mwangi as a novelist as is evident from the literature review. It is noteworthy that even a contemporaneous publication such as *The Columbia Guide to East Africa Literature in English Since 1945* (2007) edited by Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi lacks an entry on this important novelist. Nevertheless, earlier scholars such as Angus Calder (1987:177) remind us that Meja Mwangi is the most interesting and exciting writer of fiction to emerge from East Africa since Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

The choice of the texts under study is justified because Mwangi's trilogy is fully representative of the urban problem under study. Roger Kurtz (1994:222) asserts that it is in the urban novels that Mwangi has made his most original and perhaps lasting contributions to Kenyan writing. He furthermore observes: "if there is a single writer whose work is representative of the entire range of Kenyan narrative fiction today, it is Meja Mwangi". He further notes: "Meja Mwangi has gone on to establish himself as one of the most prolific of Kenyan writers, publishing eleven novels in seventeen years in addition to short stories, children's books and working with a variety of projects in film" (218).

The texts of Meja Mwangi have Nairobi (Kenya) as their setting. Nairobi is a very important historical city in East Africa. Kurtz (1994) argues that London and Nairobi display superficial similarities because of their dense populations, their large buildings and their roles as administrative capitals. Nairobi was first

established as a depot and administrative centre for the Uganda Railways at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, Nairobi was the capital of British East Africa in 1907. Class and race segregations were structured during the colonial era in Kenya. Many of these in-built disparities remain in the post-colonial times that Meja Mwangi and his contemporaries such as Charles Mangua and David Mailu write about.

1.7 The Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study deals with three of Meja Mwangi's works of fiction. The texts offer a sufficient representation of the urban underclass to facilitate an in-depth investigation of misogyny in the fiction.

The study focuses on the following novels:

- (a) *Kill Me Quick* (1973)
- (b) *Going Down River Road* (1976)
- (c) *The Cockroach Dance* (1979)

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Masculinity Theory and the Feminist Literary Theory provide the theoretical underpinnings and interpretative grid for this study. The theories applied in an interwoven manner supply sufficient approaches and discussions on the nexus between gender and literature to enable a proper study of the concept of misogyny

in the selected fiction by Meja Mwangi. Masculinity Theory is derived from Masculinity studies which originated in the United States as a result of feminist and civil right movements which came up in the 1960s and 1970s. The theory was developed primarily by sociologists as a means of understanding men and masculinity. Masculinity studies since inception have received significant attention from feminist scholars such as Toril Moi (1985) and Elaine Showalter (1986) because it explains why men engage in behaviours that are harmful to women. Masculinity Theory demonstrates how competitive behaviours among men of different sociological classes may be gendered. This provides useful links in the understanding of the misogynous tendencies of the Mwangin man in the trilogy under study. Masculinity Theory challenges the view that Masculinity is biologically predetermined or natural for men and unnatural for women (Nancy E. Dowd 2008).

Robert Connell (2009) argues that masculinity is a social construct rather than a biological sex development. He further posits that masculinity exists in numerous types but the most powerful is Hegemonic Masculinity largely credited to Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

Angels Carabi (2009) notes that the main aim of masculinity studies was to provide visibility to women and homosexuals. The society was dominated by a patriarchal system headed by the heterosexual man. The ideologies of the heterosexual man had been largely transferred to disciplines such as philosophy,

literature, architecture, cinema, history, medicine, politics and mass media. Participants in the movement that gave rise to Masculinity Theory condemned racism and demanded racial equality between blacks and whites (Thomas DiPiero 2010).

Mary Wollstonecraft (1799) posits that despite Masculinity Theory having social origins, contemporary interest in masculinity also has academic roots. This is so because the late 1960s and 1970s saw women's studies in the United States being revised to integrate the study of gender into majority of colleges and universities. This consequently implies that women's studies have provided the majority of material for the academic discussions dealing with inequality and femininity as well as masculinity. Some researchers such as Michael Awkward, Robyn Wiegman, David Eng, Alfredo Mirande and Mrinalini Sinha among others have incorporated issues of race into the analysis of gender by interrelating masculinity studies with ethnic studies (Carabi, 2003).

According to Messner Kimmel (2000), masculinity is frequently related to technological competence, aggression and competitiveness while femininity is related to emotional empathy, sociability and passivity. Masculinity Theory is specifically vital to literary criticism as it contributes to an interesting re-reading and revision of texts and it further helps to question the traditional, patriarchal images of manhood in literature as well as to stimulate the search for new models of masculinity within that literature that is less sexist, racist and homophobic

(Connell, 2009). In conclusion, Masculinity Theory posits that men engage in homo-social behaviour in order to prove their masculinity to each other and to ensure that they are part of the group. (Ricci Destefano, 2010).

The Feminist Literary Theory has its origins from women's movements in the United States and Europe in the 1960s. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (2007) note that feminist literary criticism did not emerge fully formed from women's movements. It culminated in women's writing, of women writing about women writing, and of women and men writing about women's minds, bodies, art and ideas. Feminist Literary Theory has proliferated over the years into many other disciplines.

Mary Eagleton (1991: VII) posits that many feminists are engaged in debates with other critical theories such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, and Postcolonialism. Virginia Woolf (1977) posits that Feminist Literary Theory has a long history in America and Britain with its emphasis on social, political and economic reform. She further asserts that it is the "most discussed animal in the universe". Woolf's general contribution to Feminist Literary Theory is her recognition of gender identity as being socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed. Her strongest belief was that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions.

Her contribution to Feminist Literary Theory has been a subject of criticism from other significant feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi.

Showalter (1977:115) contends that Woolf accepted a passive withdrawal from the conflict between male and female sexuality but Toril Moi (2002:239) advances a quite different interpretation of Woolf's strategy. He argues that Woolf "is not interested in a balance between masculine and feminine types but in a complete displacement of fixed gender identities, and that she dismantles essentialist notions of gender by dispersing fixed points of view in her modernist fictions"(239). Woolf, Moi argues, rejected only the type of feminism that simply inverted male chauvinism, and showed great awareness of the distinctness of women's writing.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1993) analyses the African women's cause to fight patriarchy and comes up with six levels of emancipation, from colonialism and neo-colonialism, traditional structures, backwardness, racial inferiority and negative self-image. These six levels signify multiple forms of oppression instigated on the African woman. The apogee of Leslie's (1993) levels, the negative self- image that the African woman tries to fight through black Feminist literary thought is perpetuated through misogyny among many other forms such as Gender Based Violence (GBV), sexual oppression and denigration. According to Robert DiYanni (2004), feminist critics examine the social-economic and cultural aspects of literary works. This view is further reinforced by Louis Tyson (2006) when he notes that feminist literary criticism examines the ways in which literature and other cultural productions reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. This central tenet in Feminist Literary Theory, underpins the second objective of the proposed study. DiYanni

(2004) further argues that feminist critics specifically examine literary works regarding what they reveal about the role, position, and influence of women. He provides a very important link that supplies the impetus to explore the other two objectives of the study which analyze the images of women as representatives of the urban underclass in Mwangi's urban fiction and an engagement in the identification of specific examples of misogyny so as to facilitate a discussion on the bearing they have on his social vision as an African writer.

Feminist Literary Theory has several perspectives it uses to examine a work of art. Tyson (2006) argues that feminist critics hold many different opinions on all of the issues their discipline examines. He goes on to state that some feminists refer to the field as feminism[s] in order to underscore the multiplicity of points of view. DiYanni (2004:1595) reinforces this argument further by asserting that it would be better to think of feminist criticism in the plural rather than envision it as a singular monolithic entity.

Mary Eagleton (2010) concurs with both DiYanni (2004) and Tyson's (2006) position that feminist literary criticism is a broad field with a number of concurring and competing approaches. Eagleton argues that Feminist Literary Theory should probably be referred to as feminist theories rather than feminist theory. She further contends that the pluralism in Feminist Literary Theory is an indication of feminism's creativity and flexibility.

Ellen Rooney (2006) conducted a historical comparative analysis of black feminist literary studies and feminist studies as a whole. He concluded that black feminist literary studies, just like black women, had a troubled relationship with feminist literary studies. She posits that the trouble stemmed from the history of elitism and exclusion that attended to the development of feminism as a social and intellectual movement in the United States. Rooney argues it is ironical that black women were often relegated to the margins of the women's movements and even at times completely excluded from them.

This study critically examines how women in the fiction of Meja Mwangi have been misrepresented against the backdrop of the above masculinist and feminist discussions which contend that the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power, have been justified by the premise that men are superior to women. Both Rooney and Tyson (2006) concur that women have been marginalized in societal roles and this has impacted negatively on their economic and political livelihoods.

1.9 Literature Review

Introduction

In the review of available literature, we have adopted an approach that makes it possible to effortlessly understand the phenomenon of misogyny by first reviewing available literature on the subject. We shift focus and review available literature in East African fiction on the negative representation of women. In

addition, we examine relevant literature on Meja Mwangi's fiction that has significant bearing on our study.

F.E.M.K Senkoro (1982) in a study titled "The Figuring of Prostitution in African Literature," analyses how the prostitute has been represented in various works of fiction from East Africa. Senkoro asks the fundamental question that most readers would probably ask: why the prostitute? In his answer, he argues that it is because the prostitute has become a major literary motif in Africa and this neglected motif is a wide subject in itself. He observes that it embraces all the aspects of the lives of the people in Africa, if not in all neo-colonies in their social, political, economic and most important cultural livelihood. Senkoros' study contributes positively to the understanding of the socio-political miasma and decay that engulfs today's Africa. His is a pioneering study in the region and uses three novels, Abdoulaye Sadjji's *Maimouna* (1958), David Mailu's *Unfit for Human Consumption* (1973) and Mohamed S. Mohamed's *Kiu* (1972) as examples of negative treatment of prostitutes by African writers. Our study departs from these because it examines the representation of women, not necessarily prostitutes, through misogyny in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi.

1.9.1 Literature on Misogyny

Katharine M. Rogers (1966) alleges Christianity to be misogynistic, listing what she says are specific examples from the New Testament letters of the Christian Apostle Paul of Tarsus. She argues that the legacy of Christian misogyny

was consolidated by the so-called "Fathers" of the Church, like *Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian*⁴, who thought a woman was not only "the gateway of the devil" but also "a temple built over a sewer." Rogers posits that the foundation of early Christian misogyny revolves around the insistence on female subjection and its dread for female seduction is all in the Epistles of St. Paul. Rogers supplies valuable information for the study in understanding misogyny.

Margaret J. Rinck (1990) argues that it is not only rapists, mass murders, or violent wife-beaters who are examples of men who hate women. She claims that there are men who do not fit in this dramatic category but deeply hate women. In her study of heterosexual relationships, she further argues that the weapons of these men are not usually physical but rather mental and emotional, and that their hatred is expressed much more subtly. Our study builds on Rinck's findings and seeks to analyse the misogynistic tendencies of the "Mwangin man" as portrayed in Meja Mwangi's fiction. This fictional character expresses his misogyny in both physical and mental modes.

Willoby Roberts John (2002) explores the cultural legacy, tragedy and comedy, and the subordination of women among many other aspects of the Greek classical city of Athens. Roberts asserts that the misogynistic tradition in Greek literature is older than tragedy and comedy. He points out that misogyny can be traced back to as far as Hesoid, a Greek poet who lived between 750-650 B.C and who is credited for being a major source of Greek mythology.

1.9.2 Literature Review on Meja Mwangi's Fiction.

Eustace Palmer (1979) postulates that the development of urban centres as symbolized by Development House in *Going Down River Road* (1976) exists hand in hand with poverty and squalor. This is because the owners of these buildings violate the rights of the workers by under- paying them while over working them. The workers are also made to work in extremely poor conditions that expose them to health risks. The small wages that they earn cannot sustain them in habitable residential areas and are forced to live within Nairobi slums (Kenya). Palmer hails Mwangi's prowess by acknowledging that he is one of the most exciting of the new East African writers who have made social comment and analysis of the dominant trend in the contemporary urban novel. Palmer's critique is a positive contribution to our study of Mwangi's urban fiction.

Teyie J.A (1982), analyses how the modern trend in urban areas influenced and shaped Meja Mwangi's urban fiction. He highlights the contemporary themes of unemployment, underemployment, violence and the question of gender in the urban setup. Teyie's main concerns are the ongoing trends by writers of urban fiction that have directly influenced Mwangi's style of writing in representing the urban landscape. He posits that Mwangi does not show signs of having grasped the true nature of the African urban woman. We concur with Teyie's assertion and this study clearly demonstrates the misrepresentation of women in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi.

Peter Jones (1983) argues that there is more regarding urban realism that Meja Mwangi captures in the lives of the urban unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Mwangi reflects on the nature of life, in the rural areas and feels that the migration into urban areas is as a result of poverty. People migrate into these urban settings in search of jobs. Jones notes that Mwangi has presented a modern-day degraded Africa, with workers who are almost outsiders and who live independently without relatives and lack political commitment. He notes further that workers opt into drug abuse which in turn leads to addiction. He posits that money-making and drunkenness are the order of the day.

Elizabeth Knight (1983), in a study titled “Mirror of Reality: Meja Mwangi’s novels” lays a lot of emphasis on the role and functions of social commentary in the novels. Knight feels that the Meja Mwangi is apparently not a very committed social commentator. She, however, posits that Mwangi’s choice of characters indicates, to a certain degree, social commitment. Our study analyses the prevalent theme of misogyny propagated by male characters especially the Mwangin Man, the protagonist in the fiction under study.

Wegesa Busolo (1986) analyses Mwangi’s style of writing in *Kill Me Quick* (1973). He examines the writer’s use of various artistic devices, consciously and unconsciously and makes conclusions at the end. With regard to style, Busolo identifies the use of a cyclic pattern in the story. He posits that the cyclic pattern in the story is incidental rather than consciously planned. He goes on to analyze the

use of dialogue in the novel as an aspect of style and concludes that the writer fails to explore what goes on in the minds of the characters because of over reliance on their speech only. He perceives Mwangi as a writer who only views his characters as people trapped in a situation they cannot extricate themselves from. He asserts that Mwangi fails in convincing the readers that he has a clear understanding of the processes at work in the society that have as a result led to the imbalances. Busolo postulates that at the time of writing *Kill me Quick* (1973), Meja Mwangi had not developed a perspective that would have enabled him to see beyond the fatalism that he sees in *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Busolo finally concludes that Mwangi has the potential to develop into a more socially and artistically conscious writer. Busolo, however, contradicts his findings when he notes that Mwangi is a better writer than Cyprian Ekwensi (1921-2007) because of his awareness on the implications of the issues he raises. Our study departs from Busolo's at this level because it presupposes that Mwangi is consciously aware of the state of his characters' minds and analyses women characters in the texts under study.

Ikone Chidi et al (1991) take an in-depth examination of the historical growth of the urban novel in terms of its writing. He posits that the massive incursion of people into urban areas is as a result of sudden new tastes and wants which only the city can offer, create and provide. He maintains that the poor rural folks who fail to meet the expectations of these towns go for substitutes that eventually lead them into illicit activities such as crime, alcoholism and moral decadence. The

“Mwangin Man” under study, is a perfect example of this category of the urban underclass.

Lars Johansson (1992) in a study titled “In the Shadow of Neocolonialism: A Study of Meja Mwangi’s Novels (1973-1990)”, takes a keen interest in the origin and content of the ideology of Mwangi’s work. He specifically takes an in-depth analysis of tradition-modernity conflict manifested in Mwangin fiction. The study argues that the conflict has been broadly portrayed in Mwangi’s Mau Mau novels: *Carcass for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975). Our study focuses on the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi and in particular, the representation of women in the selected texts.

Werner Graebner and Eleonore Schnitt (1992) analyze Meja Mwangi’s Nairobi trilogy: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) on the dietary trend in the texts under study. They argue that food and drink are fundamental necessities of life and that they carry social and cultural meanings. They further augment their case by noting that social and cultural meanings are not only deeply rooted in everyday activities but are also transferred into literary texts where they act in constituting narrative functions and hence help to convey certain messages. They posit that food and drink in general, consumed and prepared in certain ways, help the reader clarify situations and generate expectations to further development of the narrative. The study argues that popular literature contains impressions of dietary habits in East Africa such as what people

living in big cities like Nairobi eat, what they eat, where they eat and with whom and how they eat. Our study appreciates the findings that Werner and Schmitt find and concurs with their observation that there is socio-cultural evidence to the effect that dietary habits are expressed in Popular East African Fiction. Our study, however, is interested in the misogyny expressed by the “Mwangin Man” in the trilogy of urban tales by Meja Mwangi.

Roger Kurtz (1994) analyses the development of the Kenyan novel by looking at the historical milieu that led to its production and posits that the first generation of works written in the 1960's formed the thematic repertoire which the succeeding generation of writers built on. He explores the relationship between the novel and the city, and how obsessions and fears about urbanization have been expressed and represented through different generations of Kenyan writers. Kurtz puts together the first annotated bibliography of all the Anglophone Kenyan novels that have appeared since Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote *Weep Not Child* (1964). It is a comprehensive introduction to the postcolonial novel in English. He identifies three broad areas: the first generation of the sixties- the 'golden age' of the seventies- and the years after Kenyatta in the 80s and 90s. Kurtz identifies a unifying feature, which is an uneasy but marked emphasis on the city-particularly Nairobi. He argues that the city is used by novelists as both the site and the symbol for a range of obsessions and fears about postcolonial society. Kurtz emphasizes the changing ways in which the city has been portrayed since Ngugi's first novel. For example the relation of popular literature to the city: the portrayal of women

therein and the special status of Meja Mwangi's urban novels. This study builds upon Kurtz's recognition of Meja Mwangi's "special status" and primarily examines the representation of the urban underclass woman in Meja Mwangi's urban novels.

Griffiths Gareth (2000) believes *Voices in the Dark* (1970) by Leonard Kibera to be the first Kenyan novel to present a realistic perspective of the urban dwelling. He argues that Meja Mwangi presented his works with lots of narrative power but with lots of harshness in his portrayal of the urban low life especially in his earlier novels such as *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Griffiths, however, concedes that the characters in Meja Mwangi's latter novels such as *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) are more realistically presented in terms of psychological credibility because they show contradictions that are in the Kenyan society. Our study seeks to demonstrate that Meja Mwangi portrays women as socially, economically, politically and psychologically affected by the misogyny in urban spaces.

Ayobami Kehinde (2004a) notes that literature is a mirror of society and most African writers usually reflect sociological issues in their writings. He critiques Meja Mwangi's novel *Going Down River Road* (1976). He argues that it depicts a neo-colonial African society where extreme class structures have left grave consequences in society. With corrupt neo-colonial leaders, the lives of the people are characterized by all forms of [un]conventional injustices. He postulates that by allowing the characters in the novel to resign to fate, the author gives the

impression of the hopelessness of the African post-colonial experience, thereby [re] inscribing the aesthetics of apology and pessimism in the text. However, his paper suggests a more optimistic and pragmatic approach in addressing socio-political issues in post-colonial Africa.

Ayobami Kehinde (2004b), in a different paper, notes that African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment. He asserts that their texts mostly reflect and refract the socio-political events in their societies. He notes that, initially, African literature was a tool for celebrating the heroic grandeur of the African past but it later was used for anti-colonial struggle. Presently, it is being employed as a veritable weapon for depicting the post-colonial disillusionment in African nations. He concludes that African literature is always chained to the experiences of the peoples of the continent. He examines the discourse of post-colonial decadence in contemporary African fiction. One of Meja Mwangi's novels of post-colonial disillusionment, *Kill Me Quick* (1973), is used as the case study for the discussion. It is observed that in Mwangi's prose text, post-colonial pains in African nations are imaginatively captured with apt narrative devices. Kehinde's paper is based on the premise that there is always awareness on the close relationship between African Literature and its historical context (s). Essentially, Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973) is explored with a view to highlight how the author has contributed to the discourse of the motifs of pains and disillusionment in the post-colonial African novel. But this study interrogates the representation of women in the urban novels of Meja Mwangi.

Tom Odhiambo (2007) examines very pertinent issues in the urban space, the issues of crime and violence in post-colonial Kenyan fiction. The essay focuses on how three Kenyan writers have dealt with the themes of crime and violence in their fiction. Through examination of the fiction of John Kiriamiti, Meja Mwangi and John Kigia, the paper postulates that the prevalence of juvenile delinquents in this fiction and the related acts of violence and criminality could be read as indicators of the failure of the post-colonial Kenyan state to include these young men (and women) into the mainstream of society. Odhiambo (2007) further argues that there is a correlation between marginalization of the youth in society and their adoption of anti-social behaviour as strategies to access material resources. Consequently, our study examines misogyny, as a fundamental aspect in the urban postcolonial Kenyan fiction of Meja Mwangi.

Segun Akinyode (2007) analyses social cause, consequence and commitment in African fiction with focus on Mwangi's *Kill me Quick* (1973). He looks at his motivation behind the urban novel. According to him, Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973) is an almost photographic representation of the emerging urban setups in Africa which are viewed as portraying urban society as it is. Our study concurs with Akinyode's position and posits that the author revisits a pertinent issue in the urban landscape: the issue of misogyny among the urban underclass.

Mark Kemoli (2007), in his analysis of the various aspects of alienation in Meja Mwangi's urban fiction (*Kill Me Quick, Going Down River Road and The*

Cockroach Dance), concludes that the main characters in the texts under study have been alienated from all means of production. Kemoli postulates that this alienation has had a negative impact on the lives of the urban population represented in the texts. Kemoli's findings are that the characters are disillusioned. However, our study focuses on the female characters that have been misrepresented through misogyny in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi.

1.10 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based purely on library research aimed at the main tenet of the design, which is gathering an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour.

Data Collection.

Primary Data.

The sources of primary data for the study are from *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) by Meja Mwangi.

Secondary Data

The study enriches its primary data with secondary data sought from journals, books, dissertations, theses and projects obtained from the Post Modern Library and the Literature Resource Centre at Kenyatta University. The Jomo

Kenyatta Library and Literature Resource Centre at the University of Nairobi were also consulted. Online sources such as African Journals (AJOL), Cambridge University Press, JSTOR, Sage Journals Online, and Project MUSE, were also accessed from the Post Modern Library at Kenyatta University in carrying out this study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data from primary and secondary sources have been subjected to analysis in determining how women have been represented in the selected texts as well as to clarify the social, economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women. Finally, an examination of the manifestation of misogyny has been done to determine the bearing it has on Meja Mwangi's social vision as a writer of African fiction. The data has been presented in the form of a discourse and has been structured into five chapters to enable a fair presentation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IMPACT OF MISOGYNY ON WOMEN CHARACTERS IN *KILL ME QUICK* (1973)

2.1 Introduction

The award-winning *Kill Me Quick* (1973) is the book that announced Meja Mwangi's entry into the Kenyan literary scene, a decade after his compatriots Ngugi wa Thiongo and Grace Ogot. The book helped dispel Taban Li Liyong often cited claim that East Africa was a literary desert. Mwangi creatively follows in the picaresque tradition and pens down the story of Meja and Maina, two youths who move to Nairobi from their rural homes soon after completing their high school programmes. The two hope to find decent employment with only their high school qualifications. They soon realize they will never secure jobs as they lack specialized training to fit in any work environment in the city. They become disillusioned and Meja even contemplates suicide. He tries desperately to secure a job, long after his friend Maina has lost all hope. They turn to delinquency in the back streets of Nairobi. Meja and Maina soon become jailbirds as they both serve jail terms intermittently and together for different crimes. They are taken to cell number 9999: The den of the most crooked ruffians in the country.

After the publication of *Kill Me Quick* (1973), the novel that put him on the East African map, (Kurtz 1998), Meja Mwangi went on to firmly established himself as a prolific writer of popular African fiction, publishing eleven novels in

seventeen years between 1973 and 1990. Mwangi was however, criticized for his engagement in popular literature. Chris Wanjala, a Kenyan scholar of African fiction was Mwangi's greatest critique citing popular literature as "trashy" and lacking in seriousness when addressing important themes (Wanjala 1980). In an interview, Mwangi acknowledged that indeed his work lacked seriousness but however, wanted to be regarded as a serious writer of African fiction.

The popular writing can't go on. I mean, one can only write so much on a certain subject before the readers tire and eventually return to the more serious literature. The excitement caused by the emerging popular writing should soon settle down. There is a great future for serious writing here... (Lindfors 1980, 76-79).

Meja Mwangi even considered the option of using a pseudonym in his works of popular literature although it never materialized. "My only mistake was that I didn't use a pseudonym for my popular novels, and use my own name for the rest. That way I would have avoided all this criticism." (Kurtz 1998: 228).

Meja Mwangi actually used a pseudonym Davis Duchi for the *Assasins on Safari* (1983), however, plans to have an entire series with the pseudonym with Longman Publishers however, never materialized. (Kurtz 1998). *Kill Me Quick* (1973) was therefore published under his real name in 1973.

Bernth Lindfors (1980) posits that *Kill Me Quick* (1973) is partially autobiographical because Mwangi wrote it after graduating from secondary school and discovered that together with his friends, they could not secure jobs with just

high school certificates. The book immediately won Mwangi a significant literary accolade, the coveted 1974 Jomo Kenyatta prize for Literature.

The Chapter is pegged on the first objective of the study. The exploration of how misogyny has affected women characters socially, economically, psychologically and politically in *Kill Me Quick* (1973).

2.2 Women Characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973)

2.2.1 Sara

Sara is the most developed female character in *Kill Me Quick* (1973). She is the lone female in the whole of Shanty's Land gang. She is the Razor's girlfriend. The narrator introduces her in Chapter Four when Maina meets the Razor also known as Kimaito. The Razor claims Maina used to be his classmate in Standard One. He remembers Maina very well when he meets him in town and introduces him to his gang at their hideout in Shanty Land where he is the leader. Sara is part of the gang and we meet her like all other women in the texts under study, wearing a skirt described as indecent, as it showed more than what it covered. The narrator tells us she also had extremely huge breasts that threatened to push out her blouse.

She was wearing an extremely short skirt and her and her thick thighs showed more than could be called decent. Her huge breasts pushed her blouse out in front of her so hard it looked like it would rip and spill them on the floor. Studying her carefully, Maina

decided that though she could not be called beautiful, she was as much a woman as any (62-63).

Feminist Literary Theory provides for the examination of women in fiction to determine how positively or negatively they have been depicted in the text. Sara has by no doubt depicted negatively as she is also depicted as being extravagant when she buys expensive cutlery after Maina single handedly raided a house in stark daylight, while the owner was in and made-off with a coat full of money. The narrator says in an attack of womanliness, she purchased the expensive luxuries. It also foreshadows what will happen later in the text when Sara realizes that she is oddly placed in the gang and would want to pursue her dream of one day owning the expensive cutlery and play housewife to a responsible man who can provide for her.

She soon realizes that she is a woman and not a gangster and she leaves the Razor, in a fashion similar to Wini's, when she left Ben in *Going Down River Road* (1976). This marks a change in the life of the Razor. We are told that his temper rises and his blade is seen more often. His leadership qualities are greatly challenged, as he now is unable to maintain discipline in his gang like he used to when Sara was still with him. The gang members stop fearing him and he then resorts to alcoholism to drown his sorrows.

His health deteriorates fast from the heavy drinking and he eventually succumbs to alcohol poisoning. His body is found in a ditch one morning. Sara represents a section of urban women who are caught up in relationships with

gangsters. They end up in these relationships as they have no one else to turn to. They lack basic education to help them secure jobs. These women are also not daring enough to go out on survival adventures like their male counterparts.

2.2.2 Delilah

Not a well-rounded character in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), but significant in the life of Maina, one of the main characters in the text. The narrator observes that she is the most beautiful young maiden in Shanty Land and has large black eyes, long black eyelashes, a small round face and a row of evenly trimmed teeth just beginning to turn brown at the tips. She has just gotten a job as a barmaid at the Friends Bar in town. Maina finds this a challenge to him and a brief episode between the two carries a lot of significance in the lives of both Meja and Maina. The duo had come to the city with the hope of securing jobs after high school and was unable to, despite their numerous efforts. Delilah on the other hand being a woman, in a largely male-dominated and oppressive society somehow manages to find a job. This is a major challenge to Maina. In the brief encounter between the two, we get to know that they are in love and Maina fears losing her to the millions of bar patrons at the Friends Bar. He knows only too well that nothing good ever comes from being a barmaid other than exploitation.

Delilah is optimistic that Maina would marry her one day and have children with her. She therefore asks him if anything will ever come out of their union. “You love me? ...Maina will you marry me? She asked slipping her hands

behind his back. The question hit him like a sledge-hammer but he smiled boldly. ‘When?’ he asked her.” (87). Maina knows that nothing more than good company would come out of their friendship even though he truly loved Delilah. The narrator observes that Maina indeed loved her;

“The real truth was that he too loved her. She was the only person in the whole of Shanty Land and the only woman in the world who really understood his every emotion, his every problem and most of all, his fears. But he did not want to admit to her there and then that he loved her.” (88).

It is through Delilah’s optimism that we get to know how Maina views women, marriage and family life. Through the narrator, we get to know Maina’s thoughts. Maina outlines reasons as to why the two cannot get married. He feels that women always put affection before reasoning. “But then women always did put affection before reasoning” (88). Maina had during his school days promised some girl he would love her, marry her and have a family with her. It never materialized.

“A woman wanted to be loved, yes. But she also wanted some more. She wanted a husband, a home, children and happiness and security. Apart from love Maina had nothing else to offer. He could not take her into the Razor’s hut as his wife; no there were enough troubles in there already without adding more.” (88). He understands what women want and he was not going to be coerced into promising the impossible. Maina tells Delilah that they should just be friends

without marriage. Maina had quickly thought about his current predicament before communicating his feelings to Delilah.

Maina lives with the gang in their small hideout in Shanty Land and Sara would not like another female in her territory. Second, the gang would not stand children if the two were to bear any as Delilah wanted. Finally, Maina knows children need to be brought up by a father who could keep them satisfied seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. None of which he could provide at the moment. The two therefore grew apart as Delilah went on to become a barmaid at the Friends Bar as Maina continued with his criminal activities with the rest of the gang.

Delilah eventually was married by a patron at the Friends Bar where she was working as a barmaid. Upon losing all hope with the Shanty Land gang, the narrator tells us that Maina's heart was full of insecurity and hopelessness. He went out in search of Delilah, his old girlfriend.

Maina's heart was now full of insecurity and hopelessness. He tried to retrace his old girl companion Delilah but without success. She was neither at the old Shanty Land nor at the new one. He even had the courage to go to the Friends' Corner but there he found a different girl and she told him that Delilah had left to be married two years earlier. And that was the last bit of hard luck. Delilah had found her man after all. (151-152).

Upon discovery that Delilah had been married to someone else, Maina lost all hope in life and opts to end it rather than continue living in the state of

hopelessness. He unsuccessfully tries to commit suicide by hanging himself inside the Razor's shanty but is rescued by the rest of the gang while still dangling on a rope fastened on the highest point of the roof.

His friends found him dangling from a rope fastened at the highest point of the roof. They cut him down, and since he still had some life in him, they worked on him until he could speak again. They were all very sorry about their friend's failure of courage and they told him so. (152)

Delilah's unceremonious exit from Maina's life signifies the greatest change in him in the book. He now realises that he is failure in everything including holding on to Delilah. His disillusionment reaches an all time high.

I am not afraid of anything,' he told them. 'I have done almost everything in this world. I have committed all crimes you can think of and been jailed for most of them. I have been in prison more hours than I have been out of it within the last five years. While I was in I dreamed of lots of things I had not done. And when I went out I did those things and went behind bars again. I am just sick and tired of this. I mean, where does it all lead to? I am not being of any help to anyone now, am I?' (152).

Meja Mangi later recreates a similar scene in *Going Down River Road* (1976), when Wini left Ben to married by her boss Mr Caldwell. Her exit just like that of Delilah, marks a change in the life of Ben as he is now greatly disillusioned and misogynistic.

2.2.3 Biblical Allusion

In an allusion to the biblical narrative of Samson and Delilah (Judges 13-16), Meja Mwangi recreates the story of betrayal in *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Samson, God's servant in the bible, had enormous levels of power that in various occasions he killed over 3,000 Philistines single handedly (Judges 15: 9-20). The bible says that Samson, loved a woman known as Delilah and made her his wife. Delilah however, betrays Samson to the Philistines by telling them Samson's secret over where he gets his strength from. She let the Philistines shave off Samson's hair, which was the source of his strength. What made it worse is that she betrayed him for money, 5,500 pieces of silver. In *Kill Me Quick* (1973), Delilah betrays the love between her and Maina when she is married to another man who promises her a home, a family and security, things which Maina could never provide for her.

2.2.4 The Women of Cedar Avenue

The women of Cedar Avenue in *Kill Me Quick* (1973) are depicted as being naïve. They do not suspect that Maina could be up to no good when he visits them and dupes them into paying him an advance for the delivery of milk. They clearly do not bother to do a background check to ascertain the credibility of Maina as a milk delivery man. It would be logical to counter check who this stranger is purporting to be a milk delivery man. Maina observes that it is not possible to reason with the suburban women as they would take offence as soon as

one starts to reason with them. So, he has learnt to handle them softly. Mwangi therefore portrays the Mwangin Man as being extremely intelligent to be able to achieve such a feat. This also reveals a male-dominated society hell-bent on oppressing women through misogyny perpetrated mainly by the Mwangin Man.

In probably the worst case of violence in the texts under study, Maina kills an innocent woman following a disagreement with her husband. This is after he went back to his rural home, several years after he had left his parents and siblings for the city in search of employment. He returns home to find a new family living in the same hut that belonged to his father. The new owner tells him that Kamau, Maina's father, squandered all his money to send him to school and so had to sell their home and move elsewhere to survive. He is overwhelmed with rage and emotion that he fights both the man and his wife in their house, killing them both. Maina then runs away from the crime scene and is arrested the following day, 15 miles away and covered in blood and mud.

2.3 Social Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973)

Majority of women characters in the text under study have been subordinated to miniature roles such as those of bar maids and wives where they play little or insignificant roles as compared to their male compatriots. These roles assigned to women require no special skills to perform. For example Delilah, the only other visible woman in Shanty Land apart from Susan, is a bar maid at the

Friends bar. Meanwhile, her boyfriend Maina is a juvenile delinquent but is engaging the resource that is his brain to extort money from the women of Cedar Avenue. It is his ingenuity that ensures the gang has food to last them for weeks. Sara's role is that of wife to the Razor, the leader of the Shanty Land gang, and has no special role other than being spouse to him. This social stratification of the society represented in the text has assigned women miniature roles in society like the ones given to Sara and Delilah.

Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981) argues that literature results from conscious acts of men in society. It is, therefore, a product of the society as writers consciously depict social realities in their fiction. Ngugi, for example in *The River Between* (1965) where he mirrors an African patriarchal society divided by religion on one side and African traditional culture on the other. Today, African societies are still largely patriarchal and, therefore, oppressive to women. Patriarchal social organizations consist of male-dominated power structures, which only recognize the male as the family head while relegating women to the periphery.

The society depicted in *Kill Me Quick* (1973) unconsciously engages in misogynistic tendencies in their everyday activities that affect women socially. Meja Mwangi recreates the image of an immoral urban society in Nairobi. He creates the Mwangin Man who represents the male gender in society who bear the greatest responsibility in oppressing women, mainly through the perpetration of

misogyny. The character crosses from *Kill Me Quick* (1973) through *Going Down River Road* (1976) and finally to *The Cockroach Dance* (1979).

The temper of the Razor, an experienced criminal and seasoned gangster in the city in Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973), rises from the moment Sara his girlfriend abandons him and his gang. His blade which he uses to intimidate and instil discipline on his gang members is now seen more frequently than ever before. "Sara suddenly discovered that she was a woman not a gangster. She deserted the Razor and his temper became very bad. His blade appeared too often and he could no longer keep gang discipline." (151). His gang eventually loses faith in his leadership as he is unable to maintain discipline. His misery after Sara's departure leads him into alcoholism and he eventually dies of alcohol poisoning.

After the death of the Razor, several gangsters take over the leadership of the criminal gang in turns including both Meja and Maina, but none is able to last long and hold the group together the way the Razor had done during the turbulent times.

Several men took the opportunity to try their hand at leading the leaderless gang. The Sweeper used too much force and killed a gang member when enforcing discipline one morning. He was hanged for that. The Professor tried his hand. He tried all his logic but failed completely. He went mad trying to make the one-eyed Crasher see things from his point of view, with both eyes open. ...More gangsters tried their luck and also failed. Maina tried and gave up

after losing a fight against a rebellious gang member. Meja tried and found that he too would not get far in the career without killing one of his reluctant subjects” (151).

The Razor is, therefore, the only successful leader of the gang who had managed to accomplish the feat with Sara on his side. Her departure seemingly marks the end of the gang. However, despite her silent role in maintaining unity in the gang, Sara was oppressed at many fronts. She rallied the gang against accepting Maina into the group. Her spirited campaign is however, defeated when the Razor over rules her in his capacity as the leader of the gang. The Razor uses physical and psychological warfare to instil discipline in both the gang and in Sara. The gang fears the Razor’s shiny blade and follows his instructions to the letter.

Earlier in the study, we argued that misogyny, an oppressive attitude directed towards women, is manifested in various forms such as sexual discrimination, denigration, violence, and sexual objectification of women. Other forms of misogyny include: unwelcomed sexual advances, suggestive comments or jokes, requests for sexual favours as well as varied forms of verbal harassment directed towards women. Upon Maina’s introduction to the gang in Shanty Land by Kimaito, he engages in sexual objectification of Sara. He observes that she was not beautiful but a woman like no other however.

These manifestations of misogyny dot the text under study and negatively impact on the socio-economic, political and psychological lives of women. Perhaps the most damaging effect of misogyny on women is psychological as

sexual violence or discrimination has far reaching implications on the wellbeing of victims. Interpersonal relationships are most affected as victims of sexual abuse tend to keep to themselves. This results into solitude as they lack trust in friendships. This state may lead to various other mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.

2.4 Economic Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973)

Women in the text under study have also mainly been depicted in occupations of low skill, earning meagre income. This suppresses them economically and forces them to look for any type of employment for survival. Delilah, is forced to work as a bar maid at the Friend's Corner Bar in town after failing to get any other form of employment. Sara, her female compatriot, and girlfriend to the Razor, is forced into a relationship with a gangster so as to be provided for. She however, realises that she is not a gangster and leaves the gang. She represents the numerous women characters in Shanty Land, who are unable to go out on criminal adventures like their male companions in search of the elusive income.

2.5 Psychological and Political Impact of Misogyny on Women Characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973)

One of the tenets of Feminist Literary theory is to advocate for political emancipation for women in literary representations. Theorists in the field see a future where women would be held at a high pedestal and properly represented in fiction. Acts of misogyny are arbitrary events on the lives of women as they are sudden and unexpected. As

a result, women may experience severe psychological harm. The psychological impact of misogyny on them is both long term and short-term. Sara who is depicted as the girlfriend to the Razor, is not at peace psychologically as she is in a relationship with a gangster.

She is a victim of the wrath of the Razor on several instances in the text. For example when Maina joins the gang and is greatly objected by all gang members led by Sara. She holds a meeting with the rest of the gang in the absence of the Razor and Maina. Upon discovery of the secret meeting, the Razor threatens everyone including Sara with his shiny knife, warning them against any future meetings without his authorisation. Sara eventually deserts the Razor.

Kehinde (2004) argues that African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment. He further posits that their texts mostly reflect and refract socio-political events in their societies. Meja Mwangi's fiction under study reflects the political climate in Kenya in the 1970s which seemingly has not changed much today. Women representation in positions of leadership today is still low but better than what it was when Mwangi penned down his urban trilogy. In the 4th March, 2013 General Election, Kenyans went to the polls and voted in Members of Parliament, Senators and Governors as part of the country's top leadership according to the provisions of the Constitution. However, not a single woman was elected as Governor or Senator.

This affirms the position that the present-day society has yet to fully value women in positions of leadership although they were accorded special seats both in Parliament and Senate yet the new constitution which Kenyans overwhelmingly voted for in a national

referendum in 2010, brought with it provisions which require at least two thirds of women representation in both Houses (Parliament and Senate) as well as other top State positions. The provision saw the creation of an additional 47 special seats in Parliament strictly reserved for women in the 47 counties. Political parties also nominated 16 women Senators according to party strength in the Senate in line with the new laws as no woman had been elected to the Upper House.

Meja Mwangi mirrors a similar society, which accords women very little recognition, if any. In *Kill Me Quick* (1973), there is nearly zero representation of women in the text. Sara and Delilah are the only visible female. They are accorded very little space in the text and largely remain flat characters as focus is entirely on Meja and Maina. Sara plays the miniature role of being the Razor's girlfriend and helps him maintain order and discipline in the gang. She however, abandons him and he resorts to alcoholism.

He no longer is able to maintain discipline in the gang and they in turn lose trust in his leadership. He is later found dead in a trench after a drinking spree. It is later found that he died of alcohol poisoning. Delilah is a flat character but plays a vital role in advancing Meja Mwangi's social vision for women. She manages to secure a job in the city as a bar waitress and this poses a major challenge to both Meja and Maina who also came to the city in search of jobs but are unable to secure any employment.

The situation is no different with Delilah in the same text under study in this Chapter. Delilah had a vision of a bright future as wife to Maina. She wants the two to get married, have a home and make a family. She is however, not psychologically settled as she wants

Maina to confirm to her that he will eventually marry her and that her dreams and aspirations would one day materialize.

Maina knows only too well that those ambitions have no realistic chance of being achieved. Delilah therefore, finds another man who can offer her all that she wants in life at the Friends Corner Bar where she works as a bar maid. She therefore gets married to the man. Her decision imparts suicidal thoughts in Maina to the point that he unsuccessfully hangs himself at the Razors house in Shanty Land.

Kemoli (2007) concludes that characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) have been alienated from all means of production. They have therefore become disillusioned with life as they have no means of earning a living. Mwangi starts the novel *Kill Me Quick* (1973), with a poem attributed to the voice of all street children in major Kenyan cities represented by Meja and Maina.

Days run out for me,
Life goes from bad to worse,
Very soon, very much soon,
Time will lead me to the end.
Very well. So be it.
But one thing I beg of you.
If the sun must set for me,
If all must come to an end,
If you must be rid of me,
The way you have done with all my friends,
If you must kill me,
Do so fast.
KILL ME QUICK

The persona in the poem knows that his death is imminent and only prays for a quick and less painful death to escape from the suffering in the back streets

he undergoes. He knows that as much as things are bad for him, they can only get worse.

2.6 Conclusion

This Chapter set out to explore the first objective of the study. We discussed the impact that misogyny has had on the socio-economic, political and psychological welfare of women in *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Misogyny has been detrimental to the social livelihood of women as patriarchal structures advocating for male dominance relegate them to behind the scenes. Psychologically, women have been greatly affected by the various forms of misogyny such as sexual violence which carries both long and short-term effects. Economically, women have been depicted in occupations of low skills. This has made them resort to indecent forms of employment such as prostitution so as to earn a living. In several instances, they lower their dignity in the search of that elusive extra coin.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEPICTION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *GOING DOWN RIVER ROAD* (1976) BY MEJA MWANGI

3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, we undertake a critical analysis of the women characters depicted in the *Going Down River Road* (1976). The Chapter will focus on how women in the primary text under study have been depicted by analyzing roles and character traits assigned to them. Kurtz (1998) in an in depth study of city life and in special Chapter dedicated to Meja Mwangi, notes that *Going Down River Road* (1976) is the novel that solidified Mwangi's literary reputation by winning him the 1977 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature. This was soon after winning the 1974 prize for his fast paced *Kill Me Quick* (1973). It is after the publication of *Going Down River Road* (1976) and consequently winning the prestigious literary award twice that critics started examining Mwangi's work more critically. Kurtz goes on to describe it as the "the Nairobi novel par excellence."

The novel's memorable opening lines that set its tone are:

Baby should not have drunk coffee. He urinated all of it during the night and now the smell lay thick and throat catching, overcoming even the perfume of his mother's bed across the room. In the bed Ben lay with the boy's mother curled in his large arms, warm and soft and fast asleep. But Ben was not asleep anymore. The pungent baby urine stink had awakened him long before his usual waking up time (2).

Meja Mwangi creatively writes the story of Ben Wachira and his friend Ocholla. The book paints an image of a disillusioned man who had been discharged from the Pan African Insurance Company after it was discovered that he had earlier been dismissed from the military following a guilty verdict from a marshal court. He is now a construction site worker with Patel and Chakur Contractors who are tasked with building “Development House” in downtown Nairobi. Ben lives with Wini, a retired prostitute and a secretary at Messers and Jones Company in Culture House along Government Road in Nairobi. They live in a single room in a run-down apartment along River Road. The building is overrun with squalor and vermin. For example we are told the shower is very dirty:

The communal shower room was dark, cold and stale smelling as usual. The floor was littered with broken bits of soap, scrubbing rags, stones, cigarette filters and general trash. Slimy green fungus grew on the outer edges of the floor and spread some way up the walls. A woman’s blood-stained underpants hung on the nail behind the door. The dim twenty-five-watt electric bulb threw an anemic light on the peeling walls (6).

Ben met Wini at the New Garden Hotel bar when she was still a secretarial student and slept with her. They then moved in together. Ben spends his free time in brothels and bars along River Road with his friend Ocholla.

Ben is shocked when Wini abandons him and Baby and runs-off with her white boss Mr Caldwell. Ben is devastated and loses trust in women. He becomes misogynistic and hates all women. In a moment of compassion that he

continuously regrets, he adopts Baby despite a letter left by Wini instructing him to take him to an orphanage. He raises him up alone. Baby, however, a product of the evil environment around him, drops out of school and turns into delinquency. Ben rescues him from his life in crime and sends him back to school. Ben and Baby move in with Ocholla in his shanty along the Nairobi River when the landlord kicks out Ben claiming his contract was with Wini and not Ben. Things, however, take a turn when Ocholla's big family come to the city and move into the small shanty that already houses Ben, Ocholla and Baby. Their friendship is strained by the arrival of Ocholla's family as his two wives demand that Ben should move out with his delinquent adopted son who "beats up Ocholla's son's, eats too much and even rapes his daughters" (244).

3.1.2 Conceptualizing Women Characters in the Text

This Chapter analyzes the images of women in Meja Mwangi's trilogy as representatives of the urban underclass. The Chapter identifies women in the primary texts and then proceeds from such an informed position to the critical analysis of the characters.

Characters play a very vital role in literature as they control the plot of the story. They help bring out themes. Because of this, characters are indeed among the most analyzed components in literature together with themes as they both provide fertile ground for literary critical analysis. It is from this informed position

that the study finds it appropriate to proceed in critically analyzing images of women in the trilogy of urban tales by Meja Mwangi.

3.1.3 Character Roles and Types in Fiction

Character roles are the functions that characters serve in developing the plot in fiction. Works of fiction have several characters, some well-developed and others are just mentioned in passing by the narrator. Each character, however, serves a particular role in advancing the story. The main character roles in fiction are:

Protagonist: He or she is the main character and the story revolves around him. He is the central pillar and controls events in fiction. H/she is the character that the reader identifies most with. In the selected texts, Meja and Maina in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), Ben and Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* (1976), Dusman and Toto in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) are the main characters as the plot revolves around them. Together they form the group this study refers to the Mwangin Man. Meja Mwangi's revolving male characters in his trilogy of urban fiction.

Antagonist: He or she is the character that poses the greatest challenge to the main character. In the texts under study, several characters play this role in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), Wini in *Going Down River Road* (1976), and women in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) play the role of antagonist. Other minor character roles include; Mentor, Tempter, Sidekick, Skeptic, Emotional, Logical and Catalyst.

Different types of characters in fiction are used to advance plot. The main types of characters include; Major or central. The main conflict revolves around them. Minor characters are the direct opposite of major characters and help in telling the story. They furnish the reader with additional information which, help them to better understand the story. They also complement other characters.

Dynamic characters evolve over the span of the text. The reader interacts with them and shares in their evolution. Static characters remain largely unchanged throughout the plot of the story. They do not evolve as dynamic characters do. Round characters usually are fully developed and the reader gets to know their inner thoughts and feelings apart from the narrator telling us their physical appearance. Flat characters usually have just one character trait and do not feature much in the story. They do not help in the advancement of the plot.

Historically, women characters in East African fiction have been misrepresented by not being accorded sufficient positive representation as most are depicted as failures. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981:10), for instance, highlights in his prison diary the importance he accords to his heroine, Jacinta Wariinga by observing that “because women are the most oppressed and exploited section of the entire working class. I will create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being.” (10).

This brings to mind the numerous women characters in Ngugi's books such as Muthoni in *The River Between* (1965), Wanja in *Petals of Blood* (1987) as well as in the fiction of other East African writers who have been oppressed.

Kehinde (2004) argues that since literature is a mirror of society, most African writers reflect sociological issues in their writings. Sociological issues such as misogyny, crime, drug abuse and prostitution have been given major prominence in the selected texts under study. Mwangi highlights the plight of the urban poor in his trilogy using detailed descriptions that makes the reader share in the experiences of his characters. The detailed description brings to life the many Kenyans and East African's undergoing the sociological issues in urban spaces. He for example recreates the many brothels that dotted the back streets of Nairobi in the 1970s and 1980s. Mwangi brings us close to the realities that prostitutes go through as they try to earn a living in a society that is determined to wipe them out of existence. These social evils that dog the urban population are what Mwangi creatively captures in his fiction.

3.2 Mwangi's Female Characters

Feminist Literary theorists examine how female perspectives and experiences have been represented in a work of fiction. Using this, they judge the fiction as one that either oppresses or elevates the status of women in the society represented in the text. Women in the texts under study have been given very little prominence and women's issues have also been greatly undermined.

The Mwangin Woman has been largely depicted as a flat character, satisfied with oppressive societal structures such as misogyny. Women in the city, just like their counterparts in rural areas, have been oppressed. They have to deal with issues like patriarchy, discriminative traditions and oppression common in traditional African societies. Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) does a much better job of representing the plight of women in the urban setting as compared to other urban tales such as *Son of a Woman* (1988), and *Son of a Woman in Mombasa* (1986) by Charles Mangua. Mwangi achieves this by later introducing well-rounded female characters who are assertive and aggressive and are able to compete in the urban spaces together with the oppressive male characters.

Simon Gikandi (1987) postulates that women in popular literature have often been cast as sex objects to be consumed by men, while politically engaged literature has historically subordinated women to the nationalist project presenting them as symbols of the motherhood. Ben and Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* (1976) on several occasions use tough American slang to refer to sex such as 'a screw' or as 'a lay.' They casually refer to women and prostitutes as if they were objects to be subjected to manipulation. Ocholla in one occasion likens women to dogs and says they should be beaten to instill discipline in them.

3.3 Wini

Wini, the only visible well-rounded and dynamic female character in *Going Down River Road* (1976), plays the role of antagonist in the fiction that

revolves around the life of Ben Wachira. At the opening of the book, the reader would easily identify Wini as one of the main characters as the narrator introduces her on the very first page. Her role, however, evolves and becomes that of a protagonist. The narrator depicts her as being callous and exploitative. She is a secretary to a Mr Caldwell at Messrs and Jones Company situated in Culture House along Government road in Nairobi. The narrator introduces her when she is nude and is very generous in describing her nudity. She has a slim curvaceous and beautiful body and her breasts hang neat and loose with the narrator likening them to two ripe pawpaws. Her buttocks are tight in an athletic way when bent over. Her hair is plaited. The detailed physical description of Wini paints an extremely beautiful image of the character.

Wini's character is creatively developed from that of a caring, loving, mother and wife at the opening of the book to that of a callous, unappreciative woman towards the close. Wini has very many complex traits and the narrator puts in a lot of effort into describing her. She is depicted as being enterprising and hardworking just like all other city women we come to encounter in the text. She combines her school life with prostitution and motherly duties so as to survive in the hustle of the city. Later, she struggles to bring food to the table when Ben moves in with her since Ben is a mere construction site worker earning peanuts at Development House and spending all his month's earnings in brothels.

She is also depicted as being philanthropic and caring as she sometimes gives Ben money to go and drink *Karara* with his buddy Ocholla. She also takes in Ben to live with her when he loses his job at the Pan African Insurance Company.

Wini raises her son Baby during his infancy, which indeed is arguably the most important and delicate stage of human development. Many young mothers in the city in Wini's predicament would have either procured an abortion or disposed-off the baby soon after delivery. But Wini takes care of Baby in her single roomed apartment along Grogan Road. Wini has also promised Ben and Ocholla to look for better jobs for them through her white boss who she goes out with frequently, much to the chagrin of Ben. This shows her level of humility.

Wini is also portrayed as an independent woman. She fends for herself and her infant through proceeds of prostitution. She eventually lands herself a job at Messers and Jones Company and she is able to provide food for herself and Ben.

Wini's dark side is revealed when she abandons both Ben and Baby as she runs off to be married by her boss Mr. Caldwell. This marks a significant turning point in the life of Ben and his adopted son. Wini's callous nature comes out when she cares less about Ben spending his entire monthly salary in a night drinking *Karara* with his buddy Ocholla. She even supplements Ben's salary. On several occasions, the narrator tells us that Wini would go out with her friends and leave Baby alone in the house, only to return and find him sleeping in a pool of urine.

Psychologically, the narrator portrays Wini as not being contented with life and this foreshadows a possibility of her seeking a better life later in the text. This we learn from her complaints every morning of how short the night is. From the narrator, we learn that she has her own clockwork system that Ben doesn't interfere with as she first turns herself over once or twice before opening her eyes to complain about the shortness of the past night. From the second page we learn that they have very little in common with Ben as he describes the lousiest moments of his life were when they meet with Wini in a café in town and acted as if nothing was the matter. Wini represents the typical urban wife who faces challenges of delicately balancing her house chores and office work.

In a way, Wini represents all prostitutes in the text who are forced into the oldest trade in the world by circumstance. She is literally forced to fend for her son through scavenging from men at the New Garden Hotel, a brothel in down town Nairobi. The unnamed father of his son Baby abandoned her when he discovered she was pregnant. Wini ends up as a commercial sex worker as she is still a secretarial student at a college and she cannot secure any other well-paying job in the city to earn a living and raise her baby.

Wini is also portrayed as a failure. She fails as a mother to Baby when she abandons the child to get married to her boss Mr Caldwell. She abandons Ben and leaves a letter together with a cheque of 1,000 shillings and asks him to take Baby to an orphanage. After reading Wini's letter, Ben is lost, feels alone, helpless and

afraid. Just like he was after losing his job at the Pan African Insurance Company before Wini came along and took him in. The reality of his abandonment forces Ben to shed tears as he is overwhelmed with emotion:

Tears stream down his cheeks into his thick rough beard. He covers his face with his hands, clutching the letter and the cheque, strangling them in his calloused hands, lowers his head to his knees and sobs. He sobs manly heart-rending sobs, his body and mind chilled to stillness. (129).

Wini's move drives Ben into full-blown misogyny, as he now hates all women with a passion. Finally, like all other women we come to meet in the texts under study; she is portrayed as being adulterous. Wini first has illicit sex with her boyfriend and ends up pregnant. She then joins Ben in an unholy alliance after he picks her up at a brothel. The narrator observes that Wini's dark past keeps haunting Ben, but he dismisses it most of the time likening Wini's situation to that of the greenest, healthiest grass which grows on top of a compost. Later in the text, Ben resigns to his fate and admits that Wini is indeed a whore, but justifies it by saying at least she is a respectable whore.

Kemoli (2007) concludes that characters in *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) have been alienated from all means of production. They have therefore become disillusioned with life as they have no means of earning a living. Mwangi starts the novel *Kill Me Quick* (1973), with a poem attributed to the voice of all street children in major Kenyan cities represented by Meja and Maina. The persona knows that his death is

imminent and only prays for a quick death to escape from the pain and suffering in the streets that he undergoes. He knows that as much as things are bad for him, they can only get worse.

3.4 Susan

Susan is not a fully developed character in *Going Down River Road* (1976). She is a minor character but nevertheless significant as she plays a very critical role in the life of Ben after Wini abandons him with Baby. Susan, a sixteen-year-old prostitute and barely two months into the trade excites Ben even more with her inexperience.

A plump girl probably no more than fifteen. She is a beginner by the look of her neat, organized and polite. She has not dropped into the oblivion of professional prostitution yet when they become over-decorated and mechanical in their indifferent negotiation for more money from their clients. And she does not breath beer into his face like the others, thanks heaven (142).

The narrator observes that she is a good dancer as she dances with Ben to a song that she selects from the old rusty jukebox at the Eden Bar. Susan was born and raised in one of Nairobi's slums –*Majengo*.

At a young age, she is already a mother to a one-month-old baby boy. We meet her at the Eden brothel where she has gone in search of a client. According to Ben, she is a beginner and has not yet dropped into professional prostitution. Ben

immediately likes her. Later, the two have sex having agreed on five shillings for a quick round.

But Susan's baby interrupts the session when he sends a loud cry in Susan's rented room, a floor above the Eden bar. When Ben realizes what is happening around him, and that he just slept with a new mother, he is furious and filled with emotion. He equates Susan's life to that of Wini and he bursts out of the room leaving her with a pound, the last piece of earning remaining on him. His hatred for women reaches an all time high after the encounter with Susan. Ben regrets his action almost immediately and vomits just at the very thought of what he just did to a lactating sixteen-year-old mother.

'Go away please,' 'she sobs, take your money!' she throws the five shillings at him. 'Take it and go away. Just leave me alone.'...He remembers Wini. Baby must have been that old someday. And now he remembers Wini's letter- 'the baby, our baby, not yor baby but his'....He staggers two blocks, stops and becomes sick. He leans on the wall of a shop and retches his guts out, pouring out all the *Karara* and the last remains of the food he ate three days ago (149).

The incident reminds Ben of Wini's condition several years back. Feelings of hurt come back to him as he remembers how Wini deserted him for her white boss Mr Caldwell.

3.5 Prostitutes

From the onset, it would be important to note an earlier study of the prostitute in African fiction. Senkoro's (1982) analysis of the prostitute motif in various works of fiction from East Africa underlines the importance of the prostitute in the advancement of major themes. Because of this major role, the prostitute has dominated works of urban fiction. In East Africa, notable works of fiction that the prostitute has featured considerably include Charles Mangua's *Son of a Woman* (1971), *Son of a Woman in Mombasa* (1986), David Maillu's *My Dear Bottle* (1973), and *After 4.30* (1974).

In Mangua's *Son of a Woman* (1986), Dodge Kiunyu, the main character, was born of a prostitute mother-Theresa Ngendo, and later marries Tonia, also a prostitute. His mother-in-law, Miriam, is also a prostitute working with his mother. This makes the two most important women in his life prostitutes. Kiunyu, born in Eastleigh in Nairobi, never knew his father well as he had been imprisoned for life and he only met him two minutes before his death.

Other texts which, Senkoro studies include Abdoulaye Sadj's *Maimouna* (1958), David Maillu's *Unfit for Human Consumption* (1973) and Mohamed .S. Mohamed's Swahili novel: *Kiu* (1972).

Most women in the texts under study are depicted as prostitutes. They are easily manipulated by male characters into accepting lower rates for their sexual services. For example the prostitute from Jerusalem whom Dusman finds on the

street in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). She demands two pounds from Dusman but eventually settles for five shillings. Most of them however, remain unnamed with the most significant ones being Wini and Susan in *Going Down River Road* 1976.

3.6 Ocholla's wives

Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* (1976) is married to two women. Although not well-developed characters, they proved to be a major obstacle in the lives of Ocholla, Ben and Baby. They remain nameless throughout the text and the reader only interacts with them in the closing chapters when they join Ocholla in the city. This follows an outbreak of diarrhea and drought in the village where they live. They claim all the cattle died from drought. Left with nothing else to do, they carry all the children as they are on school holiday and travel to the city, where Ocholla is residing and works at Development House. Their bold move depicts them as presumptuous. They justify their visit by telling Ocholla that he has not visited them in a long time and that the children wanted to see him.

The arrival of Ocholla's wives in the city marks a major turning point in the text as the lives of Ben, Ocholla and Baby are affected. They have to share the small shanty and the two friends can no longer drink their *changaa* as they used to in the shanty. Their presence also strains the relationship between Ben and Ocholla to breaking point. This is after Ocholla tells Ben that he should move out, as they are too crowded in the shanty along Nairobi River, which he claims ownership to.

Ocholla also claims that Baby eats too much and even rapes his daughters. Ben on the other hand claims part ownership of the shanty as both him and Baby helped to rebuild it after the City Council burned it down together with other informal settlements along the river valley. The two friends argue at the *Karara* Centre, the next warmest place after home, about the overcrowding and the ownership of the shanty. “But... he is a little bit too aggressive. You know what I mean, Ben. He beats up the boys, rapes my girls... terrorizes the whole family. And they say he... he eats too much.” (244).

This breaks the last straw on Ben’s back as he bangs the counter and declares that he buys all the food that is eaten by all the “brats” of Ocholla. In a rare display of emotion, Ben tells Ocholla that he lets women rule him. He swears to go and whip them. The two, however, leave the Karara Centre as friends as the story ends.

3.7 Incidences of Misogyny in *Going Down River Road* (1976)

Misogyny manifests itself in the texts under study in various ways such as speech, character thoughts and authorial intrusion. Virtually all women we interact with in the texts are portrayed as being callous, exploitative or prostitutes.

In the opening paragraph of *Going Down River Road* (1976), we are introduced to Wini, who is living with Ben Wachira, the main character and her son who is unrelated to Ben. Later, we are introduced to four other women belittled in terms of description. There is a childless old woman. The name already

carries derogatory overtones as she has failed to procreate. This is the first real life example of misogyny in the text as the narrator openly despises her.

“Three retired whores” (1976:2) who occasionally do some ‘special duty’ with the landlord or somebody else are then introduced. Effectively, the three pay rent through sex unlike the rest of the tenants. This foreshadows the reader’s interaction with more prostitutes in the text.

In a flashback, Ben gives away his misogynistic mind set when he recounts how he was jobless and he would meet Wini at a café in town. He says these were the lousiest days of his existence, as they would chat about nothing important just to pass time. During such days, Wini would, without much difficulty, force him to accept some pocket money and Ben would head straight to his favourite joint, The *Capricorn*⁶ bar and drink all of it with his buddy Ocholla. Ben was, therefore, barely bearing with Wini’s company just so as to get her money. He really did not love her like she did.

Wini’s nude body is first described using unrefined adjectives as the reader interacts with her for the first time when she is sleeping with Ben.

“...The young mother walked to his bed and so coolly bent over him. Her breasts hung neat and loose over the boy like two ripe papas, her buttocks stretched tight in an athletic way.” (5). Later, Ben heads to the communal shower vividly described as having slimy green fungus infested walls. While there, he finds a woman’s blood stained under pants and his disgust captured in the choice

of words depicting the situation reveals just how much he loathes not only the panties but also women. He only uses the shower to clean himself just the same way he uses women to satisfy his sexual needs.

Gikandi (1987) postulates that the images of women found in East African popular fiction were generally negative. He further argues that they were cast as sexual objects to be consumed by men. The case is no different in Meja Mwangi's fiction. Women have been overtly objectified and in the process negatively depicted. For example, the horrid state of the shower in *Dacca House* is likened to the backside of a bending woman.

Similarly, the Mwangin Man, represented by Ben and Ocholla, engage in sexual objectification of women in several instances in the text (*Going Down River Road* (1976)). The first instance being when Ben notices very light traffic in town as he heads to work and associates it to Amazon's who are still sleeping with their men.

At Development House, the construction site where Ben works, his buddy Ocholla without any decorum shouts at Wanjiku, a female colleague, asking her if she would 'screw' with him for lunch. She, however, knows Ocholla has no money to buy anyone lunch. This means that if at all he had money to buy her lunch, she would probably sleep with him. This exemplifies the idea that women have internalized their role as sexual objects for the sole satisfaction of men's needs. The reader would expect female characters to protest misogynistic remarks

from the Mwangin Man represented by Ben and Ocholla, but instead the opposite happens. Wanjiku does not protest the sexist remarks, but instead ignores him because he is broke.

In *Going Down River Road* (1976), Ben recounts the day he lost his job at the Pan African Insurance Company. He had been summarily dismissed and paid his monthly salary. He then goes out drinking to suppress his misfortunate and according to the narrator; he is determined to do it in style, and probably with a woman. This view accentuates the idea that women are merely objects expected to provide men with fun. Ben is depressed after losing his job and only two things could raise his mood; alcohol and a woman. He eventually heads to the New Garden Hotel, famed for its prostitutes, and meets Wini. On the particular day, Ben says the outer bar is packed with some of the prettiest prostitutes in town.

Nici Nelson in his book *Representations of Men and Women in Town (Nairobi)* (2002) argues that with the exception of a few novels, women in cities are portrayed negatively as people given to ‘manipulate their sexual attractiveness to men to entice, tantalize and entrap male characters.’ He goes on to say that it is either that or they are represented as sexual objects with nothing to offer a man but sex. In fact, Ben in *Going Down River Road* (1976) tells us that the girls at the New Garden Hotel were busy shaking their ‘moneymakers’ (breasts and bottoms) so as to attract customers.

The Mwangin Man perpetrates violence against women in several instances in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). Toto fights with Amazons in brothels over beer or over non-payment for sexual services advanced to him. The most memorable of these battles happens in their run-down apartment in the full view of Dusman. The two fight until the Amazon smashes a dressing mirror. The turn of events annoys Toto that he throws her down the stairs of Dacca House leaving behind her head dress, wig and platform shoes.

Tom Odhiambo (2004) points out that prostitution is probably the most prominent theme within the Kenyan fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. He cites Gloria Chukukere (1995), Florence Stratton (1994) and Mary Oluassen (2002) and observes: “Whenever sex/sexuality is written about in the African novel, invariably the question of promiscuity and prostitution forms a significant element of this discourse because it has become one of the most important components of urban life in Africa” (93-4). In the trilogy under study, with the exception of a few, most of the men and women are portrayed as having loose morals. Majority of the women in the texts are either prostitutes or former prostitutes. The main female character in *Going Down River Road* (1976), Wini, is a former prostitute at the New Garden Hotel. Ben, the main protagonist in the book, promotes prostitution through visiting brothels with his buddy Ocholla.

Ben notices a familiar prostitute at the hotel and recalls the sexual experience with her. He recounts that she was a poor performer since she was

“labouring in bottom gear when he was in overdrive, breaking his back, and pulling leg muscle.” (1976:9).

He hates her and doesn't give in to her demands to buy her a soda or a beer. Ben says anything bought for this one is money wasted. This is an open display of hatred for prostitutes (women). He doesn't value them at all after sleeping with them and gauging their sexual performance. He later meets Wini, a prostitute, who approaches him and asks for a cigarette.

Ben has kind words for her even though he later comes to hate her with a passion. As soon as she arrives at Ben's house along Grogan Road, she walks straight to his bed and starts undressing. Maybe that is why Ben has all the lovely things to say about her. She is sexually attractive when nude. Ben admires her beauty to the extent of contemplating marriage but stops his thoughts when he remembers that Wini is a professional prostitute.

In the third chapter of the book, Ben's misogyny heightens. The action takes place at the Small World Club where a sea of humanity is all sweating as they dance to a live performance. The girls are described as being nice and innocent until one gets them into bed. Apparently, they are usually talented in bed, 'so smooth, so confident' that one wonders what they might have been taught in school. The narrator tells us that it's twice as difficult to dispose of schoolgirls as regular hookers. He confirms that women to him are mere sex objects to be used and disposed of. This is another instance of misogyny.

The only reason Ben is at Small World Club is to pick up a prostitute. This we learn from the second paragraph (49) when the narrator says Ben was not looking for innocence but for a lay, a good lay. At the club, the narrator describes women as objects as evidenced in these lines: “His eyes picked a girl, weighed her, discarded her and picked another. He was healthy and going for a healthy bargain.” (49). Which effectively means that the better (prettier) the prostitute, the more expensive, and Ben is willing to pay extra for a ‘good lay’. Ben notices the Gorilla with a few girls who he refers to as ‘dishes’. The girls are, therefore, nothing to him other than sexual objects to be consumed.

Ben wonders why the lousiest guys get the cheekiest women. This is after he tries to smile at the two women that are with the Gorilla but they are hostile and unimpressed by him.

From his conversation with the Gorilla, we learn that there are sugar daddies at the club ready to pounce on young schoolgirls.

In Chapter Four, the duo of Ben and Ocholla head to *Karara* Centre after work to look for *Karara* and women. We establish that Ben loves small bodied prostitutes while Ocholla has a preference for big women. He questions Ben’s choice of small women asking him what he sees in small ones and Ben answers that he loves ‘compactness’. This is still in light of their view that women are nothing but objects. Ocholla calls small women trash. Modern-day women prefer maintaining small bodies and most of the time end up on diets that lead to anorexia.

Ocholla is still very much a prisoner of the traditional view on women, and does not see how a woman would not have big breasts and a big bottom.

At the Club, a big-bodied woman approaches Ben to his disgust. His basis for hating big women stems from his sexual encounters with them. He says, for example, that this prostitute looks like she is incapable apart from her mouth ‘stinking like the blocked toilet back at home,’ (1976:70). He quickly loses interest in her and she notices this and leaves Ben alone.

Without any provocation, Ocholla shouts to the amazement of all the patrons in the bar, all women are bastards. This is in reference to his two wives. He goes on to say his children are sick and need school fees. This indeed is the height of misogyny in the text and it slowly builds up to higher levels when his two wives and children join him in the city.

Ocholla’s hatred towards his ever-demanding wives is highlighted once more when he says that harlots know how to do it not like those bitches of mine. This also confirms that Ocholla is only interested in women as sexual objects and nothing else; not as wives or human beings, only objects to satisfy his insatiable sexual appetite and then discard them unceremoniously.

As Ben staggers home after parting with Ocholla, thoughts run across his mind and the third person narrator draws us to his thoughts. Ben resolves not to drink too much *karara* and to buy Ocholla a beer one day. He also says to himself

that it takes a man to really hate a woman. “It takes a man like him, a buddy of Ben’s to loath his parasitic wives.” (75).

Chapter Five is rather short with action taking place at Ben’s neighbour’s room. The wall separating the two rooms-Ben’s and his neighbours-Max is described as being paper thin so Ben overhears everything happening in the room. Max and his room-mate Sacho have brought home two prostitutes and in the wee hours of the morning, they physically abuse them by kicking them out of the room after the duo demanded their pay for services offered to the two room-mates. We learn that the two are even underage as they are schoolgirls and one loses her underwear in the melee. Wini who is pretending to be asleep, watches secretly as Ben enjoys the scuffle in the next room.

There are several incidences of confrontation between Onesmus and Ben when they insult each other using profanity bordering on misogyny. For example, in chapter seven, Onesmus calls Ben the son of a bitch. In the next chapter, Ben refers to him as a son of pregnant baboon and vows to kill his mother. Onesmus, churns out a similar insult directed to Yussuf later in the chapter.

In the assembled ‘parliament’ of discontent workers led by ‘Chairman’ Machore, the workers blame the wife of the Finance minister, for the increase in food prices. A show of total contempt for women. One worker adds that women are not human.

Ocholla receives a letter from home, which informs him that one of his wives has delivered a new baby. Ocholla is furious and openly shows disgust towards the new information. He tells Ben that he doesn't remember the last time he slept with any of his wives to warrant a baby. He clearly suspects his wives of infidelity. He is so deflated and Ben watches his weathered body roll through the debris to the latrines at the construction site. Ben reflects: "If there is anything worse than knowing your wife is expecting a hundredth baby, it is the not knowing whose hundredth baby she is in for" (104).

Ben wonders what kind of women Ocholla's wives are; "What sort of wives are they to run a man into the ground like that...." He knows Wini is expecting a baby too but he is not sure if it is his. "... with all those hateful cousins and uncles who have been taking her out so often. And her bastard boss, Johnny! Why is it the greenest healthiest grass grow over the septic tank Damn!"(105). Ben is rightfully disturbed by Wini's past. He asks himself why Wini had to be a prostitute before he met her. He keeps referring to her as a prostitute throughout the text. For example, after work, Ocholla offers to buy Ben a drink. But he declines saying that he left his harlot wife sick.

Ben arrives home to find Baby all alone soaked in urine. Wini is missing never to return. Ben desperately waits for her for months to return, but that never happens. Ben's misogyny reaches climax after being abandoned with a baby. He instinctively looks for Wini in brothels and bars in town for three days until he

decides to go to her workplace- Messrs Jones and Company in Culture House along Government Road. It is while there that he is made to understand that Wini ran-off with his white boss-Johnny Caldwell. Her former colleagues inform him that they understand he went to marry her at an unknown location.

Wini leaves Ben a letter and a cheque of Sh1, 000. The contents of the letter evoke feelings of betrayal in Ben. He flushes the letter together with the cheque down the toilet in Culture House and decides to raise Baby as his own and not take him to an orphanage as per Wini's letter. He goes to *Karara* Centre and drinks himself sick. While there, the usual prostitutes approach him and he swears to one that he will kill her. "I will...kill you," he says (130).

Ben says "Bastards! All of them. Even Wini...all ready to go lay with the next car that turns up with some money...Swines. Scavengers. Harlots. Never trust any of them. Not one."(130). His misogyny reaches its climax at the close of part one and vows never to trust any woman again. He even refers to them as pigs, bitches and dogs. "Bitches! All women are dogs. They will lay with anybody for anything. Bitches, bitches..." (130). Finally, in a show that all his trash talk about women is not empty talk, he attacks with a beer bottle a prostitute who smiles at him.

In Part Two, Ben starts to accept his predicament. His misogynistic tendencies have, however, not diminished. At the good old *Karara* Centre, described as "stuffy as hell, warm as home," (135) Ben disagrees with a prostitute

and he strips her naked by yanking her bra and blouse. Ben then goes for her skirt revealing that she is wearing no underwear and confirming that she is indeed a prostitute ready to offer her sexual services. The narrator refers to her big sized naked body as a “basking hippo” (137). What is interesting is that nobody comes to the rescue of the poor woman when Ben is assaulting her. This we come to see as a common occurrence in Meja Mwangi’s other city tale -*The Cockroach Dance* (1979).

Girls at the Eden bar lack decorum and throw themselves at any available man who looks wealthy. One asks Ben plainly if he wants sex as he appeared as if he had money to spend.

In a moment of weakness, Ben succumbs to the charm of a sixteen-year-old prostitute. Susan, is so desperate that she is willing to have sex with Ben for five shillings. Ben is so disturbed when he regains his senses and discovers Susan has a one-month-old baby. He is so disgusted that he walks away in protest leaving her with all the money he had, Sh20.

Ocholla comes up with a philosophy, which he shares with Ben after the duo finish supper. He says: “Women and kids are like dogs, treat them as such and you will never go wrong ... Women are bitches” (198-9). This is in response to his brilliant teaching of Baby not to wet his bed. The duo engages in drunken discussions after supper which, revolve around their misogyny. Ben curses Wini

for abandoning him and Baby who now hates school and is engaged in delinquency. “Damn Wini...Curse Wini. Women are real dogs,” (207).

The book comes to a close when Ocholla’s two wives and an army of children arrive after a spell of drought and famine in the village has forced them to relocate to the city in search for survival. Ben, Baby and Ocholla are filled with hatred when the two women and children arrive as they are having dinner. Ocholla reproaches the elder wife asking her why they did not write to inform him they were coming. In the first public admittance, Ocholla declares: “I hate women,” (216).

Later, Ben engages Simon, a patron at *Karara* Centre in a drunken discussion where he declares that: “Women are no good to anybody. Only good for screwing, and screwing,” Simon declares (238). Ocholla joins Ben at *Karara* Centre and they argue over their living conditions in Ocholla’s small hut. Also, Ben’s hatred for women again shows when he declares that he will beat the two women if they continue talking ill about Baby.

The two friends in a rare scene engage in an argument towards the end of the book. Ocholla plainly asks Ben to move out of his shanty. An angry Ben declares that it belongs to him, Ocholla and Baby as they rebuilt it together after City Council demolished it. Ben tells Ocholla: “You let women rule you, then tell me you are sorry. What kind of a fucking man are you?” (246). Ocholla seems to have accepted his situation and decided to save his marriage other than his

friendship to Ben. He walks out of *Karara* Centre in protest and Ben follows him shouting; “Wait for me; don’t leave me here alone, Buddy!”(246).

3.8 Conclusion

The Chapter finds that women represented in the fiction under study have been depicted as being promiscuous, overtly weak, and generally evil. They have also been depicted as unprincipled. The Mwangin Man represented by Ben and Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* (1976) has, developed an oppressive, and fixed armful pattern of behaviour directed towards women the reader interacts with in the society represented in the text. The study has also established that women in the text have played a major role in advancing the major themes. They include prostitution, betrayal, promiscuity and disillusionment.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEARING THAT MISOGYNY HAS ON MEJA MWANGI'S SOCIAL VISION FOR WOMEN

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter explores the third objective of the study which examines the author's social vision for women in his urban trilogy under study; *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). The Chapter lays more emphasis in last text (*The Cockroach Dance* (1979) to see how Meja Mwangi social vision for women shapes up. In doing so, we will examine the contribution of the literary text to the advancement of social concerns of women.

Kurtz (1998) posits that in many ways, *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) is a perfect remake of *Going Down River Road* (1976). He argues that it is because Mwangi recreates a story in the book similar to Ben and Ocholla's in *Going Down River Road* (1976), only this time featuring the Dacca House roommates Dusman and Toto. It is the story of Dusman Gonzaga and his desperate attempt to seek justice for the disenfranchised and powerless. Dusman, a meter reader with the Nairobi City Council, lives in a run-down tenement building, Dacca House along Grogan Road, over-run by squalor and vermin. His room-mate is Mohamed Ahmed, known to him only as Toto. Dacca House is occupied by an eclectic mix of characters such as the Bathroom Man, Magendo, Mganga, Chupa na Debe. Most of these tenants double up as criminals in the city. Dusman's life is filled with a series of misfortunes thrown haphazardly throughout the text but he is still

determined to fight injustice and corrupt systems. He first loses his job at the Sunshine Hotel after being found in a compromising position with a woman, a fellow colleague in one of the hotel rooms.

At his current position, he is disgusted with parking meters that he tries desperately with no success to get a transfer back to reading water meters. He genuinely feels that the parking meters and the Dacca House cockroaches are against him and are plotting to bring him down. His boss gives him a week's leave and is sent to see Dr. Bates, a psychoanalyst who also fails to understand Dusman's phobia for cockroaches and parking meters. He resorts to visiting brothels and bars in Nairobi during his free time with his room-mate. They occasionally bring prostitutes to their room. In a show of defiance, Dusman organizes a botched rent boycott by all residents of Dacca House to force the landlord, Tumbo Kubwa, to improve their living conditions or reduce the rent they pay.

At the close of the novel, police conduct a raid on Dacca House and swoop on all the criminals residing in the building. Dusman is arrested in his room with Charity Njeri, a prostitute. Toto is also arrested in the criminal milieu he lives in and is charged with conspiring to defraud his employer, the Commercial Bank, of over half a million dollars in forged traveler's cheques. He is charged with others not before the court. He is also charged with Dusman for handling stolen property.

Another Dacca House criminal, Magendo Kali, is arrested and charged with handling stolen clothing and electronic equipment worth thousands of pounds. Sukuma Wiki, a vegetable hawker also from Dacca House is sentenced to a jail term of four years after pleading guilty to being in possession of six parking meters, property of the City Council. The charge states he tried selling the meters, valued at more than three hundred pounds to the Mayor of the city. Charity Njeri, the prostitute arrested with Dusman, is charged with loitering for the purpose of prostitution. She is fined one hundred shillings or six months' imprisonment in default.

Dr Bates, the City Council's psychoanalyst, testifies for Dusman and certifies that he is of unstable mental character. He recommends that he be put under observation at the Mathari Mental Hospital for a period to be determined by the court. Despite the turn of events, the ending suggests that Dusman is not yet done with his fight for lower rents at Dacca House.

4.2 The Portrayal of Women in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979)

Women in the primary texts have been depicted to be in occupations of low skill, low status and low remuneration which work to limit, devalue and marginalize their overall contribution. Women struggle to fight this negative energy directed at them. Ogundipe (1993) analyses the African woman's cause to fight patriarchy and negative self-image.

Nici Nelson (2007) demonstrates that with the exception of a few novels, women in the cities are portrayed negatively as people given to manipulate their sexual attractiveness to men to entice, tantalize and entrap male characters. Either that or they are represented as sexual objects. Pursuant to Nelson's conviction, this study finds it appropriate to proceed by appreciating the historical perspective from which women in urban fiction have been depicted.

Kurtz (1998) argues that the portrayal of women in Mwangi's urban fiction is generally abominable. He says the role of almost every Mwangian female is to serve as the object of male sexual desire. He goes on to argue that women, like cars and guns, have little importance except as signifiers of male potency and control. Charity, in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), is depicted as a prostitute who Dusman has illicit sex with on several occasions.

4.2.1 Dacca House Housemaid

The Dacca House housemaid, who remains nameless, is a significant character as she contributes to the advancement of the theme of immorality in *The Cockroach Dance* (1976). The narrator observes that she causes a major scandal after it was discovered she was carrying a baby whose paternity was in question. In retaliation, she names her employer's husband as the culprit. Her employer, the housewife, immediately discharges her-of her duties and also deserts her alleged promiscuous husband. The narrator observes that in continuing with her

vengeance, the housemaid comes out with a shocking exposé that shook the foundations of Dacca House and took two months to die down.

The sacked housemaid compiled a list of all the men on the building who had ever made a proposition to her. At the top of her list were Sukuma Wiki, Chupa na Debe and Mganga the witchdoctor. Others included the faceless ones and invisible ones too. The invisible ones are tenants who owed Tumbo Kubwa the landlord a lot of rent that they practically lived like moles. Returning back home very late and leaving very early to avoid being asked for rent.

This show of bravery however, paints a grim picture of a very promiscuous population living in Dacca House. It is a very grim picture of infidelity perpetuated by the housemaid, as she is the one who sleeps with all the married men of Dacca House including the Bathroom Man. She is therefore, depicted as being promiscuous. The list was however, dismissed as being malicious propaganda after the discovery of the Bathroom Man's name on the list. All the residents of Dacca House were in agreement that the Bathroom Man had neither the time nor the guts to see any woman other than his wife. This further portrays the housemaid as a cheat.

4.2.2 Bathroom Man's Wife

The “uncrowned queen of Dacca House,” the Bathroom Man's wife in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), is described as a shy, small, beautiful woman with small

feet. She is married to the Bathroom Man, a roadside mechanic who specializes in repairing old, broken cars. At the opening of the book, Dusman makes special mention of the Bathroom Man's wife as one of the women he danced with in his dreams. This portrays her as being overly attractive for Dusman who loathes women to dream about. Her image is a total contrast of other women in Dacca House whom the narrator likens to "African cow elephants" because of their size. *Magendo*, a neighbour and a thief, takes advantage of her timid character and seduces her to his house under the guise of trying new clothes he sells.

The narrator portrays her as being so naïve as not to see more into Magendo's intentions of wanting to sleep with her especially when he starts fondling her breasts in his room. She eventually realizes what is happening after her breasts respond to Magendo's touch and she lets herself free, taking off from his room. The Bathroom Man's Wife is also depicted as a caring mother to a mentally handicapped baby. She cares for the child despite the challenges posed by the perennial screams from the child.

4.2.3 Amazon Women

Likened to African cow elephants by the narrator in terms of build, Amazon women have been greatly differentiated from 'ordinary' women in the texts under study especially in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) where a significant number of them exist. Their heroic capabilities, which are drawn from ancient Greek mythologies, stand out.

Just like most women in the texts under study, Amazons are depicted as being promiscuous. For example, the Amazon along Campos Ribeiro street that Dusman has sex with out in the rain. She has sex with Dusman in the rain for five shillings. From their conversation with Dusman, we learn that she was a member of a streetwalkers committee that fixed prices on sexual services. This further outlines the promiscuous society that Mwangi portrays in his text.

The first Amazon we meet in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) is the Meters Superintendent's secretary. Like all other Amazons, she is a big bosomed woman with a permanent frown on her brow and a voice described to be whetted on broken bottles. Her big broad body intimidates most men including Dusman. On this first encounter, she ignores the presence of Dusman for a full five minutes yet he is standing at her desk. She continues doing her work without noticing that Dusman is there. She then dismisses him claiming that he did not have an appointment. She schedules one for him next Saturday, a whole week later.

Judy, an Amazon and prostitute at the Delicious Day and Night Club is depicted as being naïve. This is after she blatantly told Dusman that “white people don't steal.” The narrator observes that Dusman's heart faltered after Judy's assertion. They are depicted as being independent, extremely brave, rude and intimidating especially towards men. They are also depicted as violent. Toto fights with an Amazon in his room in the full view of Dusman over payment for sexual services advanced to him. In the process, the Amazon smashes the dressing mirror

into pieces. Toto beats her senseless and throws her down the stairs of Dacca House. In the process, her platform shoes, afro wig and head dress remain with Toto. She, however, has the courage as that of an Amazon to go back and demand her property despite the damage she has caused.

Amazons are also depicted as being westernized. In most Western cultures, the ideal feminine appearance is that of a woman with long flowing hair, thin waist, coloured lips and nails, heavy perfume and high heeled shoes. The Amazons depicted in the texts under study, adorn wigs, paint their nails and lips, wear heavy perfume and high heeled shoes. This is the picture of a European woman who they imitate.

4.3 Meja Mwangi's Social Vision for Women

Feminists have a vision of a future where gender, race, slavery are wiped out and everybody is treated equally especially women. Mwangi envisions an equalitarian society where women have a voice to be heard. His vision for women is positive as he paints a picture of an aggressive, assertive and authoritative woman in the final text of his urban trilogy. The Amazon, described as a large, intimidating woman, who is assertive and aggressive, features prominently in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). Mwangi places the Amazon woman firmly in the role of a social crusader who sees hope in the future of women in the urban setting. In the preceding texts, the Mwangin Man through misogyny has largely oppressed

women. The Amazon, therefore, marks Mwangi's positive social vision for women.

Mwangi also sees a future urban society, where men could appreciate the imposing figure of beautiful African women instead of the stereotypical smallish, image of a starved European woman adorning weaves, painted nails and make up. Toto's dismissal of Dusman's taste for small women instead of a large Amazon woman with a big bottom affirms the study's argument. Dusman had developed a strong hatred for Amazons after one spat into his eye with an accuracy that stunned him. After the incident, Dusman is unable to read water meters for months and is convinced the spiting woman has infected him with rabies.

Mwangi also visualizes an urban society free of prostitution. After dotting prostitute characters all through the trilogy of the urban tales, he finally creates the character of Charity in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) who is arrested and charged for prostitution. In mitigation, Charity argues that she is a single, unemployed mother of two boys and is only engaged in the trade to earn a living. The magistrate is however, not convinced that she cannot make a living doing other decent forms of work. Charity is fined Sh100 or a six months' imprisonment in default. While delivering the sentence, the magistrate is categorical that prostitution and immorality are on the rise and young women must learn to earn their living without resorting to indecent forms of employment.

Mwangi envisions a healthy man and wife relationship in society. He sees a future where women in the village join their husbands in the city and live happily in matrimony. He sees the end of long distance relationships, which encourage infidelity in marriage. He does this through Ocholla's wives who join him in his small shanty along Nairobi River in *Going Down River Road* (1976). Before the arrival of Ocholla's wives, Ben and Ocholla frequently visit brothels in down town Nairobi, and pay for sexual services from prostitutes.

Mwangi also sees a future society where men will protect their marriages at whatever cost even if it means destroying old friendships. His social vision for marriage is that man and wife should live together and nothing should separate them, not even close friends. This is highlighted in *Going Down River Road* (1976), where Ocholla is ready to end his friendship with Ben when he asks him to move out of his crowded house after his wives protest. Mwangi's view is in line with Connell (2009) who argues that masculinity is a social construct rather than a biological sex development. This is so because Ocholla overcomes his misogyny and fights for his wives by asking Ben and Baby to move out of his shanty. Ben's mind is still fixed to oppressing these two women in the same way he does to prostitutes in brothels in down town Nairobi. Moi (2005) argues that this behaviour is harmful to women and Masculinity Literary Theory as discussed in Chapter One, helps us to explain why men such as Ben and Ocholla engage in such behaviour.

Meja Mwangi has a vision for an economically and socially empowered woman in society. He pens down a story of Wini in *Going Down River Road* (1976), a prostitute and a secretary working for Messers and Jones Company in Nairobi and living in a run-down apartment along River Road. Wini is forced into prostitution after she gets pregnant and her boyfriend deserts her. She is a student at a secretarial college and has no hope of getting employment. She engages in prostitution to earn a living. Wini later meets Ben and he moves in with her. The two live in utter poverty in their one roomed house until she runs-off with her white boss, Mr. Caldwell who promises economic security that Ben does not have. Mwangi highlights the plight of Wini and through his subtext, paints a picture of an independent woman in the city, able to earn a living as well as feed her family. The image of Wini, able to make enough money to even give some to Ben, shows an economically liberated woman. Wini represents the future of women in cities that Mwangi envisions. Despite Wini's odds in life, she is able to overcome and economically liberate herself.

Finally, Mwangi concludes his trilogy of urban tales and embarks on writing thrillers such as *The Bush Trackers* (1979) *Bread of Sorrow* (1987), and the latest *Rafiki Man Guitar* (2013), which uplift women's status in society. In an interview with Lindfors (1980), Mwangi wants to be considered as a serious writer who respects women's' affairs and therefore says:

The popular writing can't go on. I mean, one can only write so much on a certain subject before

readers tire and eventually return to the more serious literature. The excitement caused by the emerging popular writing should soon settle down. There is a great future for serious writing here... I like to develop a serious story in prose. (Lindfors 1980:76-79).

Meja Mwangi went ahead to publish novels such as *Bread of Sorrow* (1987), *The Return of Shaka* (1989), *Weapon of Hunger* (1989) among many others in the 90s, which elevated the status of women in contemporary society. For example he creates Zahai in *Weapon of Hunger* (1989), a beautiful, tough, female guerrilla leader who even leads men. She was born of a warrior clan and educated in Paris and Rome both in Europe. Zaha is determined to liberate her people from civil war despite of the vulnerability she is exposed to.

4.4 Depiction Of Women In *Rafiki Man Guitar* (2013)

Meja Mwangi depicts women in positive light in his latest book, *Rafiki Man Guitar* (2013). The Mwangin Man represented by Rafiki, appears to have a brand new perception for women as he repeatedly tells his wife in various conversations in the book, that he does not work for himself but rather for her and their children. The first incident is at the Pirates' Bar and Restaurant when his wife calls him on his cell phone. In the incident, Rafiki also reveals that he has composed a song praising his wife who he refers to as *Swettea* (Sweet heart). Rafiki even hails her as the modern *Wangu wa Makeri*¹⁰. Makeri is acclaimed as

the first ethnic Kikuyu woman leader in living memory. She was also the first ever woman chief in Kenya.

...Oh, ni wewe Swettea? Kwani una homa? You have a cold? Since when? Pole Swettea, sorry, but I didn't notice you have a cold. I was too tired. From working all day for you. Yes, for my children too. I said I was sorry. I'm working hard to support you. I always have. Remember when you got it in your head to be a councillor for Majengo Ward? People thought I had gone mad too, the way I hailed you as the modern Wangu wa Makeri. You remember the song I sang in your praise. She was a good woman too, tough and strong... (4)

The fact that Rafiki compares his wife to *Wangu wa Makeri*, means that he has a lot of respect for not only his wife but also all women who aspire to be in positions of leadership. His continued reference to her as *Swettea* also shows that he loves her to the point that he does not mind calling her by the name in public.

Another telephone conversation where Rafiki refers to his wife as *Swettea* is found in Chapter Two when he is engaged in a heated argument with Manu at Patel Hire Purchase shop along Main Street. Rafiki and his wife however, argue and the conversation comes to a grinding halt when she unsuccessfully asks for money from Rafiki and then insults him as not being man enough to support her and proceeds to disconnect the phone. "...I support you too...What would make you happy? She's my daughter too. Where do I get that kind of money by the end of the day? Do you want me to rob or steal? What? What do you mean support you like a real man? Hallo? Hallo? *Swettea*? Hallo?" (11)

The Mwangin Man, however, returns to his misogynistic tendencies when Rafiki is greatly affected by his wife's comments that he is not a real man because he cannot provide Sh30,000 required as school fees for their daughter.

The narrator says wild thoughts crossed his mind and as he stood out under the unforgiving sun, it was as if his life had ceased at the very moment. Rafiki is eventually overwhelmed with emotion and storms into Manu and Patel's shop, brandishing a foot-long knife. His hatred for his wife at that very moment leads him to rob Manu and Patel in broad daylight, at 11am in the morning and with shop patrons strolling in and out of the shop. The two are people he had known for a very long time and even used to pay to listen to his music:

“Rafiki,” Manu was more startled than scared. “What are you doing?” Robbing you,” said Rafiki. Manu could not believe it. He had been paying not to hear Rafiki's new songs for longer than he could remember. Now the man was robbing him... “Why?” he asked him. “I have no money,” said Rafiki. “From me?” “And him.” “Are you crazy? We have no money.” (8)

Rafiki is, however, startled to learn that there is no money in the entire shop. Only a few coins in change from Manu's wallet. The two Indians swear to Rafiki that they are bankrupt and that the bank is in the process of auctioning their houses and cars. Rafiki on realizing the two have no money, now changes tact and tries to borrow money from them promising to pay it back as soon as he sells half his land. The pressure from his nagging wife leads Rafiki to the botched robbery along Main Street. This justifies Mwangi's misogyny.

In the next Chapter, Rafiki bluntly tells his wife “somethings are not for women” when they argue about their daughter’s admission to Dar es Salaam University, the best university in East Africa at the time. Rafiki instead wants her to go to Mount Kenya University:

As I have said before, some things are just impossible, while others are not for women...Most people believe that you have to be a man to be a king, he said to her as delicately as he could. “ Don’t get me wrong, I’m not agreeing with them. I just think that, maybe, you should call yourself a prophet and run your own church, instead. That would work. I’d support you whole-heartedly in that.” (14)

Back in the shop where Rafiki is holding Manu and Patel hostage in a botched robbery, he inspects the various appliances in the shop with an aim of stealing them and converting them into cash. This is when the traditional view of Nanyukians where women are seen as objects only good in the kitchen comes up. Rafiki weighs his prospects of robbing the Manu and Patel off a dishwasher but then realizes that the appliance is not useful to him as in his world, women are born for dish washing and not appliances to do the chore for them. “In his world, mothers and wives, sisters and daughters did the washing. Some women had other women to do all their washing for them.” (22).

4.5 Conclusion

The Chapter set out to explore the third objective of the study; the identification of specific examples of misogyny in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi and a discussion on the bearing they have on his social vision as an

African writer. In conclusion, the study finds that the highest incidences of misogyny occur in *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). Mwangi's first text *Kill Me Quick* (1973) takes a different approach in oppressing women. It has limited the number of women characters to the bare minimum. The women depicted have also been assigned minor roles and are poorly developed as characters. The only significant women characters are Sara and Delilah. Sara is the Razor's girlfriend in Shanty Land's gang. She however, plays no significant role and exits the story as fast as she enters. She deserts the Razor marking a significant turning point in the life of both him and the gang. The Razor resorts to alcoholism and later dies of alcohol poisoning. The gang no longer remains disciplined and every member takes turn as gang leader including both Maina and Meja. Delilah, plays the role of Maina's girlfriend. She has hopes that Maina will marry her one day.

This study therefore finds Mwangi's social vision for women as being fairly positive as he envisions a society where women in the urban setting are economically, socially and politically empowered. This vision is pointed out through his introduction of the Amazon woman in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979), the final text of the trilogy.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

We set out to investigate how the theme of misogyny is propagated by the urban underclass represented in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). The study argued that over the years literary critics had unjustly classified the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi as ‘non-serious’ literature and, therefore, accorded him little if any critical acclaim yet the fiction deals with intricate and vital modern-day social problems in Kenya. We, therefore, conducted an in-depth and critical analysis of the images of women in the texts under study, focusing on character roles and traits of women in the fiction.

We discussed the social, economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women represented in the fiction. We then identified actual examples of misogyny in the selected texts and a discussion thereafter on the bearing they had on the author’s social vision as an African writer

5.2 Research Findings

5.2.1 Chapter One

The Chapter focused on the background to the study, giving a detailed account of how the research was conducted. It charted the way for the study after reviewing a number of relevant studies relevant to the current study. A statement

of the problem showing the main focus of the study was then given: Meja Mwangi, a prolific writer of urban fiction, engages in misogyny in his trilogy of urban tales, and in the process, misrepresents the urban underclass woman. From the statement of the problem, we identified three objectives that guided the course of the study. These were:

- (a) To investigate and discuss the social, economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women in the selected urban fiction.
- (b) To critically analyze how women have been represented among the urban underclass in the fiction under study.
- (c) To identify specific examples of misogyny in the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi and discuss the bearing they have on his social vision for women as an African writer.

We then justified the current study on Meja Mwangi by outlining the paucity of critical studies on the novelist. We mentioned contemporaneous publications such as *The Columbia Guide to East Africa Literature in English since 1945* (2007) edited by Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi which, lacked an entry on the novelist. This was despite the fact that Meja Mwangi's fiction was representative of the entire range of narrative fiction in Kenya's written literary tradition. He has written adult literature, children's literature and some of these works have won several literary awards such as the Jomo Kenyatta Prize of 1974 and 1977 for *Kill Me Quick* (1973), and *Going Down River Road* (1976).

We then outlined Masculinity Theory and the Feminist Literary Theory as our theoretical framework pointing out relevant discussions by theorists in the two fields who have shown the nexus between gender and literature and therefore providing the theoretical underpinnings and interpretative grid necessary to carry out our study. The research objectives were then individually addressed in chapter form.

The study then outlined the qualitative research design that it used in conducting the research. The research was purely library based and it aimed at achieving the main tenet of the design, which is gathering an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. The study sought its primary data from three of Meja Mwangi's texts: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). The study supplemented its primary data with secondary data from journals, books, dissertations, theses and projects obtained from the Post Modern Library and the Literature Resource Centre at Kenyatta University.

The Jomo Kenyatta Library and Literature Resource Centre at the University of Nairobi were also consulted. Online sources such as African Journals (AJOL), Cambridge University Press, JSTOR, Sage Journals Online, and Project MUSE, were also accessed from the Post Modern Library at Kenyatta University in carrying out the study. Data from primary and secondary sources were then subjected to analysis to determine how women had been represented in the

selected texts as well as to clarify the social, economic, political and psychological impact of misogyny on women. Finally, an examination of the manifestation of misogyny was conducted to determine the bearing it had on Meja Mwangi's social vision as a writer of African fiction.

5.2.2 Chapter Two

The first objective of the study was explored in this Chapter. We argued that misogyny had negatively impacted on the socio-economic, political and psychological livelihood of women in the urban setting. It was discovered that socially, women found it difficult to interact with other members of society as their interpersonal relationships were gravely affected by aspects of misogyny such as sexual abuse and violence directed towards them. Solitude was also found to directly result from sexual harassment as victims tended to keep to themselves as they were embarrassed to relate with others after an episode of abuse.

5.2.3 Chapter Three

The Chapter addressed the second objective of the study where it argued that the images of women depicted in the texts were indeed contentious as a result of misogyny. We argued that women had been depicted in occupations of low skills or indecent forms of employment such as prostitution. It was also noted that men were on the other hand granted major roles in the fiction of Meja Mwangi with the Mwangin Man being the main character in the trilogy. The Chapter

concluded that women have been depicted as being promiscuous, overtly weak, and evil. While the Mwangin Man had developed an oppressive, fixed and harmful pattern of behaviour directed towards women in the three urban societies depicted in the texts.

5.2.4 Chapter Four

This Chapter addresses the third objective of the study. It was divided into two sections with the first section identifying examples of misogyny in the texts: *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Several examples of misogyny such as sexual abuse, violence, denigration and unwanted sexual advances were found to be used to oppress women in the texts under study. The Chapter then shifted focus onto a discussion of the bearing misogyny had on the social vision of Meja Mwangi for women in the urban setting. We established that Meja Mwangi has a positive social vision for women in the urban setting by his introduction of the Amazon woman in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). The Amazon was found to be intimidating on the Mwangin Man. Her introduction significantly reduced incidences of misogyny in *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). True to Woolf's (1977) assertion that Feminist Literary Theory places its emphasis on social, political and economic reform, Mwangi does the exact thing as he presses for women's liberation at these fronts as his trilogy progresses from the first book in the genre *Kill Me Quick* (1973) through *Going Down River Road* (1976) to *The Cockroach Dance* (1979).

5.3 Recommendations for Future Tasks

Misogyny is one of the oldest forms of prejudice against women in literature dating as early as the Greek mythologies of 532 BC. Many others prejudices such as racial, religious, ethnic and chauvinistic have dotted works of literature ever since. Contemporaneous forms of prejudice in fiction such as sexual preference of writers have since emerged.

The present study was conducted under the stated scope and delimitations of Meja Mwangi's urban trilogy of: *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). Other writers of fiction at the time such as Charles Mangua and David Mailu penned down similar works of fiction but in different settings such as Mangua's *Son of a Woman in Mombasa* (1986). The following areas can form new directions for further scholarship in relation to the present study:

1. Profanities bordering on misogyny are evident in the selected texts. An investigation into their nature and how they contribute to the advancement of contemporary themes such as chauvinism would contribute significantly to the study of African fiction.
2. Other African writers such as Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah who penned down *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) that received a lot of criticism for its use of sexist terms can be studied. A study on the language

used on the fiction would establish whether Armah's fiction is indeed sexist.

3. The Mwangin Man forms a major part of the urban fiction of Meja Mwangi. An in-depth examination of this character can be undertaken in the author's other works to establish whether there is consistency or whether Meja Mwangi has made significant thematic and stylistic departures from his earlier standpoints. This would be an original contribution to the study of Mwangi's urban fiction.

Notes

¹Karara. A mass produced traditional brew that costs half the price of European-type beers.

²Majengo: One of the biggest slums in Nairobi City, Kenya.

³Kibera: A slum area in the suburbs of Nairobi.

⁴Changaa: A potent drink distilled from Karara.

⁵Sukuma Wiki: A vegetable usually eaten as an accompaniment for *ugali*, a staple food in Kenya.

⁶Capricorn: Ben and Ocholla's favourite bar/ brothel in downtown Nairobi.

⁷Sweettea: Wife to Rafiki.

⁸Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian: A prolific early Christian writer from Carthage, Tunisia.

⁹Kibera: A suburb of Nairobi City with a big population of urban poor.

¹⁰Wangu wa Makeri: Makeri is acclaimed as the first ethnic Kikuyu woman leader in living memory. She was also the first ever woman chief in Kenya.

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APENDIX I

PHOTO OF MEJA MWANGI



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