

**NARRATING DYSTOPIA IN MODERN KENYA: PHILO IKONYA'S *LEADING*
THE NIGHT AND NGUMI KIBERA'S *BEYOND THE DARKNESS***

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Declaration

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university:

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Dedication

For my mother, Mary Wangari Kaigai, for her unfailing love and support throughout this study.

Abstract

This dissertation examines narrative representations of dystopia in Philo Ikonya's *Leading the Night* and Ngumi Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness*. The study pays close attention to how the two literary artists address the challenges encountered by marginalized postcolonial urban subjects. The study argues that the marginalized subjects engage in subversive practices with the hope to challenge the forces of marginalization. Further, the study explores how the characters engage in actions that provide fleeting moments of happiness and illusion of freedom as a means to achieving livable lives. I argue that while Ikonya's novel envisions subversion as the only means of achieving livable lives; Kibera's suggests that it is possible to transcend the social, economic and political marginalization if only the characters engage in legitimate and sanctionable practices.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Philo Ikonya's *Leading the Night* (2010) and Ngumi Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* (2006) are narratives that focus on disillusionment and despair of the modern Kenya's marginalized urban dwellers. This study examines and interrogates these narratives and explores the social vision projected by the two writers. Ikonya is a Kenyan human activist campaigner, teacher, journalist, poet, novelist and a former president of Kenyan PEN. She lives in Norway as an exile following multiple confrontations and arrests by the Kenyan government. Ikonya is known for speaking out against injustice, corruption, bad governance and police brutality for which she has been a victim of. On 8th September 2009, Ikonya was arrested whilst taking part in a peaceful demonstration outside the Kenya Anti-corruption Commission. She thus decided to leave the country for Oslo, Norway for fear of her life.

Though in exile, Ikonya has continually criticized the Kenyan government through her art. She has published two anthologies of poetry *Out of Prison – Love Songs* (2010) and *This Bread of Peace* (2010); and three novels *Leading the Night* (2010), *Kenya will you Marry me?*(2011) and *Still Sings the Night Bird* (2013). The anthology *Out of Prison – Love Songs* is a proclamation of freedom. Most of the poems arouse the need for Kenyan people in particular and other Africans state faced with poor leadership to revolt and demand for justice. This would in the long run give the people the freedom they have always longed for. She suggests that most African leaders are selfish, ruthless and lack in

character. Consequently, they deny their subjects freedom. Most of the African populace therefore is living in “prison” created by the failed leadership.

This Bread of Peace (2010) addresses the need to fight for freedom of the African continent from the black masters who took over power from the colonialist. It is a wake-up call to the new generation to emulate patriots such as Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya and J.M. Kariuki who sacrificed their lives to fight for the freedom of the people. This collection of poems also recognizes women’s role in building the nation especially in campaigning for peace and justice for all. In one of the poems, “This Bread of Peace”, the persona says: “This bread of peace/ this bread of justice/is in the power of woman” (82). Ikonya does not shy away from mentioning actual events that demonstrate the poor governance and politicking among the leaders.

In *Kenya will you Marry me?* (2011), Ikonya challenges the poor governance in Kenya across the three regimes: Kenyatta’s, Moi’s and Kibaki’s. She presents the three regimes as characterized by individualistic leaders who are ready to do anything to feed their vested interests at any cost. Through the narrator, the author calls on all Kenyans to gang up against the poor governance that is characterized by corruption, ethnicity, and injustice. She also re-writes the history of women especially their often ignored role during the struggle for independence.

In *Still Sings the Night Bird* (2013), Ikonya suggests that the elite have a role to play in initiating change. She depicts the elite pushing change both in academic fields and in

organizing protests that would call for change. The novel also addresses challenges that women in a patriarchal society go through. The women endure rites such as female circumcision and other cultural practices and beliefs that demean women. Kabi, the protagonist of the novel, rises above these beliefs and succeeds against many odds. She deconstructs the belief in her society that women are second to men. The narrator embraces a more optimistic tone than in any other of Ikonya's novels.

Kibera is a prolific writer of children's literature. His literature under this category mainly focuses on ordinary day to day lives and children's archetypal themes such as the ogre stories, sanitation, water conservation and education. His story book *The Killer Floods* (2009) highlights how human beings contribute to the destruction of environment by either overgrazing, cutting down trees and poor farming methods. Consequently, they are faced by serious challenges which if looked into would help mitigate their impact. The issue of environmental preservation is also addressed in *Regi* (1999). This short story addresses the effects of destruction of environment by either burning of forests or logging. The short story uses children characters to fictively present the challenges posed by destruction of environment both to the human beings and to the wild animals.

Aunt Pilipili (2009) addresses the issue of sanitation particularly on how to avoid opportunistic diseases that come as a result of poor hygiene. The short story emphasizes the importance of boiling river water, cleaning hands after visiting the toilet and before meals as a control measure against such diseases as diarrhea. It also accentuates the importance of draining stagnant waters and other predisposing factors that cause malaria.

The writer uses children characters to fictively portray how the society can teach children on correct sanitation.

Dima and Kidnappers (2007) focuses on the increasing trends of poaching and kidnapping in the society. The short story intertwines children's archetypal issues such as bullying with serious issues on poaching and kidnapping. Given that these two are challenges facing our modern Kenyan society, the short story places a caveat against them by raising awareness on the dangers posed by the two. *The Grape Vine Stories* (1997) the story book also focuses on poaching and the importance of protecting wild animals especially elephants which appears to be an endangered species. The story book won the Jomo Kenyatta Prize of Literature in 1997.

Kibera also writes young adult literature which majorly focuses on the contemporary issues such as poor parenting, crime involvement and prostitution. *The Devil's Hill* (2012) which falls under this category shows how young adults are lured into crime while still in school and how crime adversely affects an individual's performance in school. The novel also raises the issue of kidnapping among other crimes like smuggling of diamond, carjacking and murder. The novel was awarded The Burt Award for African Literature Prize in (2012).

In *Shaza's Trial* (2005) Kibera addresses the issue of HIV/Aids pandemic and the stigma instilled by the disease especially among the children. The short story also shows the challenges that a patient taking antiretroviral drugs faces in a society that still holds the

HIV/Aids pandemic with fear. In addition, the story book focuses on issues of kidnapping and crime that cuts across most of his works.

Ikonya's *Leading the Night* and Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* focus on dehumanized and marginalized urban subjects who live in a world characterized by oppression of different kinds, crime, corruption and totalitarian control of the state. These distressing issues are characteristic of a world that Clare Archer-Lean defines as dystopian. She contrasts utopia with its antithesis, dystopia, and argues that utopia "involves articulations of what we wish to become while dystopia is what we avoid becoming; an investigation of hope and potential transformation" (Archer-Lean, 2).

My reading of the utopian-dystopian dialectic in the two novels does not hold the two notions as polar opposites. Indeed, my interpretation is based on the fact that the multiple marginalization of characters arise out of political mismanagement of a society's good vision about its future. This interpretation of the utopian-dystopian nexus is best captured in the words of Michael D. Godwin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakashwho, in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, that:

despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia. A true opposite would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to the deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically involved is neither of these things; rather, it is utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society. (1)

I adopt and slightly modify this definition as it resonates with how Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* and Ikonya's *Leading the Night* narrativise the human conditions that are either consciously "planned" by people who wish to hijack communal projects for personal gains or that result from characters' well-meant actions that spiral out of control and enter the realm of the "unplanned". As Godwin et. al. further argue, "every utopia always comes with its implied dystopia" (2). Therefore, the presence of the utopian does not mean the absolute absence of the dystopian. Rather, as the narratives under study illustrate, the utopian involves constant and cautious alertness for the dystopian which is always lurking in the shadows of society's visions. The narratives thus show utopia as an unreachable ideal that is however worth striving for despite the challenges it involves.

As Archer-Lean argues, "the postcolonial text presents a creative response to problems of reality where the past is unknown or traumatic, present frequently disempowering and future frightening" (4). She thus argues that the 'imagined space can be collective as a recuperative and cathartic act rather than as a threat to individual freedoms" (4). This argument is important to my study of the narratives' marginalized postcolonial urban subjects given that the characters are victims of aborted hopes and shattered dreams that independence portended. Such narratives, though mainly focused on the deprived and degraded lives, can offer a cathartic effect to envision new worlds and new possibilities since even in the worst of times, there exists in these novels some moments of freedom and enjoyment that stand out in the overbearing gloom painted in the frame narratives. Through such snippet moments of fun, these novels illustrate that the dystopian

atmosphere in the narratives does not exclude possibility of hope but paradoxically highlights the effort needed for social and liberal transformation.

Statement of the Problem

This study reads two modern Kenyan urban novels, Philo Ikonya's *Leading the Night* and Ngumi Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness*, alongside each other to investigate how the narratives reveal the notion of dystopia through their depiction of urban characters pitted in a hostile, disordered world. The study explores how the narratives' deployment of formal elements enables it to portray characters who, despite their odd placement, are able to engage with forces of marginalization that they hope to mitigate, to instantiate and exemplify their search for livable lives. I argue that while the characters may be accused of engaging in degenerate and subversive conduct, the subversive and the otherwise degenerate practices provide some pockets of happiness, illusion of freedom and offer characters a chance to voice and challenge the very world that marginalizes them.

Objectives

1. To examine how the selected writers narrate dystopia in modern Kenya
2. To examine the issues that the writers address
3. Discuss the literary choices employed by the selected authors
4. To examine the social vision that the selected writers project for Kenya through art

Hypotheses

1. The two writers use construction of characters as a way of enabling them to represent dystopia in modern Kenya
2. The two novels expose what ails the contemporary Kenyan society

3. The authors employ various stylistic features to enable them narrate dystopia artistically
4. Through the narratives selected writers project their social vision for modern Kenya

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following term is used in a special way out of its conventional meaning to give special meaning relevant to this study:

Dystopia

The term dystopia refers to degenerate and dehumanizing human conditions that the marginalized urban subjects are pitted against. Such human conditions may be as a result of characters' well-meant actions spiraling out of control and entering the realm of the "unplanned" or/and deliberate efforts by those who wish to hijack communal projects for personal gains.

Justification

Framing my study within the discourse of the urban dystopia allows for interrogating the narratives' treatment of the 'urban' and the 'dystopic' against both terms seemingly absent correlates the 'rural' and the 'utopian' without which neither can make sense in the narratives under study. My focus on dystopia in the two texts is also influenced by the fact that the two novels reflect on issues that affect the contemporary ordinary Kenyan.

Therefore, the texts offer a seemingly true representation of the complexities facing the modern Kenyan society and fictively project a social vision for modern Kenya.

My choice of the two novels is informed by the fact that they are fairly recent artistic outputs that engage with political issues of our time such as corruption, marginalization of the urban subject, conflicts of the land, material impoverishment of the urban subject, and the rift between the urban poor and the rich. Although such issues are seemingly legally settled, they still demand attention because, as the narratives show, they are active reminders of how our politics, despite independence, is entangled with the politics of colonialism which it vehemently claims to have broken free from. The novels are also worth study because they exemplify how and/or where the individual and the collective intersect in the Kenyan politics and how the one casts the other into focus.

Although Kibera and Ikonya have got many texts in their names the discourse of urban dystopia in modern Kenya is best presented in the selected novels. Kibera's other novels can be classified under children stories and young adult literature. Their focus, as argued in the introduction, is limited to children's archetypal themes and issues affecting the young adults respectively. I selected Ikonya's *Leading the Night* among her other texts because of the three novels, *Still Sings the Night Bird* (2013), *Kenya will you Marry me?* (2011) and *Leading the Night* (2010), the latter predominantly employs an angry and bitter tone and a fragmented structure to narrate the challenges experienced by the characters hence foregrounding dystopia than any of her other novels.

Further, reading *Leading the Night* alongside *Beyond the Darkness* helps this study escape the blind-spots that come with the overt politics, if not politicking, that frames *Leading the Night*. This is so because *Beyond the Darkness* introduces us to urban subjects who live their life with little awareness, and sometimes a total disregard to the politics of the day. Although the urban subjects in *Beyond the Darkness* are trapped by the politics that they are disengaged from without overt politicking, the narrative is able to highlight and engage with the lethal effects of a mismanaged national politics that spirals down the common person. The choice of the two novels was also influenced by the symbol of hope underscored by the titles of the texts. The titles of the two novels, *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness*, symbolically project a social vision for the contemporary Kenyans that it is possible to overcome the forces of marginalization.

Reading the two novels alongside each other allows for an examination on how the challenges affecting the contemporary Kenyan society impact on both men and women, and how the two authors, from the different genders, narrate issues affecting both men and women. Therefore, the study is an act of criticism and does not in any way try to cast judgment on characters' actions or lack of them. It is a way of coming to terms or trying to understand the structures of power that make the urban subject in their narratives act the way they do.

Literature Review

This section reviews existing critical works on dystopia in post independence Kenya. I have paid close attention to how writers over the years use the urban setting to narrate social, economic and political ills facing modern Kenya. The section also reviews

existing works on Kibera and Ikonya. This has helped me establish areas covered and point out existing gaps. Further, this section reviews how literary critics receive the selected novels and how the existing critical materials help illuminate my study.

The study acknowledges existence of critical works that deal with dystopia in postcolonial Kenya most of which fall under the urban novel. However, of interest was critical works that give prominence to narratives of dystopia in the Kenyan context from independence to the modern day Kenya.

Roger Kurtz's *Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel* traces the growth of the urban novel using the city of Nairobi as the center stage for analysis from the 1970s through the 1980s and 1990s. He argues that the urban fiction within this historical setting depicts the city of Nairobi as a "city in crisis" (6) in that there is general strain in the provision of social amenities accruing from the upsurge in population growth. In addition, there exists a huge discrepancy between the rich and the poor. In this asymmetrical relation, the poor marginalized subjects, whom Kurtz refers to as "the underbelly" (5) occupy the lowest rung. They struggle to survive by engaging in crime, prostitution, street life and small business ventures. Kurtz's analysis, though focusing on the urban novel, is limited to the period between the 1970s and 1990s; more so, it focuses on the works of earlier writers such as Leonard Kibera, Meja Mwangi, George Maillu and Charles Mangua. My study shifts focus from the writings of the period to recent artistic output that addresses the issues facing the present day Kenya.

Jennifer Musangi's "A Walk through the Criminal's City: John Kiriamiti's *My Life in Crime* and *My Life in Prison*" examines Kiriamiti's use of the criminal figure in the representation of the city and the discourse of the urban space. The study examines the writer's use of the narrative to reconstruct both the city and the criminal world. However, Musangi's approach stems from a different premise from my study in the sense that Kiriamiti's fiction does not depict the city as a place of disillusionment and eventual suffering but for the better part of it a place of joy, material success and self definition for the criminal. In addition, Musangi's study departs from mine in that *My Life in Crime* (1984) and *My Life in Prison* (2004) which are the two primary texts that Musangi focuses on are autobiographical and limited to the scope of crime in urban spaces. My study stretches beyond crime in urban spaces and addresses other prevalent social ills that affect the marginalized subjects in urban Kenya.

Tom Odhiambo in "The (Un)popularity of Popular Literature in Kenya: the Case of David Gian Maillu" critiques the dismissive position taken by some critics of popular literature in the 1970s and 1980s such as Chris Wanjala, Elizabeth Knight and Bernth Lindfors. Using David Gian Maillu's fiction, Odhiambo argues for the position of popular literature positing that there is need to shift focus in the approach of popular literature from the comparative approach that measured the significance of popular literature in comparison to the to the so-called "serious" literature as earlier critics did. He uses Maillus's fiction as a microcosm of other popular literature fiction arguing that "the evaluation of the popularity of Maillu's fiction or lack of it should be based on the literary, creative and aesthetic merits of the literature as part of the subgenre popular

fiction rather than a comparison with the so-called serious literature”(3). Odhiambo’s study argues for the place of the popular text in redressing the complexities that the new urbanites in post-independence Kenya face hence the connection with my study which focuses on how modern Kenyan writers narrate dystopia.

Odhiambo in “Juvenile Delinquency and Violence in the Fiction of Three Kenyan Writers” studies anti-social behavior portrayed in John Kiriamiti’s, Meja Mwangi’s and John Kiggia’s fiction. He suggests that the prevalence of juvenile delinquents in this fiction points towards the “failure of the postcolonial Kenyan state to ‘include’ these young men and women in the mainstream society” (146). Although Odhiambo’s study is close to my study, his main focus is on the immediate postcolonial Kenya while my study focuses on the present day Kenya.

Odhiambo argues that earlier critics of popular literature such as Chris Wanjala saw popular literature then as carving its space in the literary space by crafting themes that arouse sensationalism, sensuousness and driven by the desire for the writers to gain profit thereby demeaning itself. The same stance was taken by Knight and Lindfors who in different terms felt that the standard offered by popular writers fell short of committed writer’s expectation in that there was general over emphasis on popular issues such as sex and lax in language and aesthetic appeal. While Odhiambo’s critique is limited to Maillu’s fiction and early critics view on popular literature, its time focus is far removed from my study which focuses on the marginalized urban subject nearly fifty years after independence.

Ayo Kehinde's portrayal of disillusionment in "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Contemporary African Fiction: The Example of Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*" is close to my study because it addresses the fears, hate, humiliation and repression as exhibited in Meja Mwangi's *Kill me Quick*. Kehinde argues that the postcolonial decadence in the novel is a "metaphor for the history of neo-colonial African nations which are encumbered with dislocation, alienation, depression and deprivation" (229). Kehinde's analysis complements my study as it gives insight on the impact of failed postcolonial states on the marginalized subject immediately after independence.

Mbugua wa Mungai in *Nairobi's Matatu Men: Potrait of a Subculture* focuses on the chaos and disorganization that is characteristic of the matatu sector in Kenya. He argues that the matatu crews are marginalized and a good percentage has low self esteem emanating from the hard economic situation in the city. Consequently, they engage in self destructive behavior such as involvement in criminal gangs and drug addiction so as to derive a sense of security. Mungai's analysis is restricted to the presentation of the matatu men. My study demonstrates that the hard economic situation does not affect only the Nairobi matatu men but their material situation is a microcosm of the marginalized subjects' form of life especially in various towns in Kenya.

Khainga O' Okembwa's "Philo Ikonya: Inkhorn of a Kenyan Poet in Prison" focuses on the artistic presentation of Ikonya's poetry. He argues that Ikonya's poetry inspire a sense of urgency and provide a melodious metaphorical wake-up call to courageous men and women in the struggle for justice. Nevertheless, Okembwa feels that Ikonya excels more as a journalist in her poems than in the aesthetic depiction. While Okembwa's review

focuses on Ikonya's poetry, my study demonstrates that there is great semblance in aesthetic appeal between her prose and poetry. Okembwa argues that Ikonya's poetry is a far cry for the impoverished African populace to revolt, rise to occasion and bring down prison offices propagated by non-interesting politicians lacking in character. Okembwa's observation however does not address her prose fiction which my study addresses. My study will borrow from Okembwa's view on Ikonya's poetry to help in interrogating both the aesthetic and thematic presentation in her novel under study.

My study found no existing critical works that focus on any of Kibera's works thus giving me more reason why I should study his works. Despite this loophole, Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* exhibits unique artistic construction of characters and handling of everyday issues that affect the marginalized subjects in urban spaces.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that Ikonya's and Kibera's works have not received sufficient critical attention. More so, the study of dystopia in modern Kenyan fiction has not been sufficiently attended to thus the need to fill this literary gap and to contribute to the existing literary works within this scope.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the postcolonial theory and the theory of the narrative. The postcolonial literary theory is useful in analyzing the two novels under study as they fall under the postcolonial. The "post-colonial" refers to the period after colonialism officially ended while the "postcolonial" denotes the legacy and aftermath of colonialism. In the novels under study, the both meanings obtain since the novels' settings are in the

Kenya after colonialism (post-independence), yet the problems afflicting the society cannot be understood outside the realm of colonialism and its neo-colonial legacies.

Major proponents of postcolonialism, such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, have different ideas about what postcolonial is about and what it involves either as a theory or in critical appreciation of artistic and cultural artifacts such as works of fiction. However, this study majorly exploits Edward Said's theorization of orientalism as colonial construction and marginalization of its subjects. Gayatri Spivak's postulations on the postcolonial subaltern as expressed in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" were utilized since in this essay Spivak asks pertinent questions about the (im)possibility of dis-articulated subjects to speak for and on behalf of the self. She demonstrates that in the event that the subaltern – a symbol of the downtrodden, oppressed and marginalized people – cannot express itself within the mainstream and dominant discourse, it resorts to alternative modes and action that makes itself visible and audible to the central discourse and those that it represents.

I found this essay worth citing because it resonates with my reading of how characters at the margin of the society in these novels, the subaltern, try to carve spaces that allow them to be heard or worth listening to. Like Spivak's example of the woman who burns herself to attract debate on her condition, some of the major characters in these novels resort to the socially unsanctionable acts such as prostitution, theft and gang life. Yet, through these acts, the narrative is able to attend to the issues of moral, economic, spiritual and political decay that haunts the society these characters live in. It is therefore

through the characters at the margin, subalterns, that the narratives interrogate the structures that lead these characters to their seemingly questionable lifestyles.

The theorization of Said on orientalism also provides investigative tools to interrogate colonialism and neo-colonial legacies that continue to plague modern Kenya as portrayed in the narratives. Said argues that the colonialist demarcated the world into a duo polarity –the East (the orient as uncivilized) and the West (the occident as both civilized and civilizing). He argues that in this dialectic, the colonialists defined themselves as superior to the non-West/colonized. Said makes it clear that the colonial subject, as a subject without agency, is dominated through ‘discourse’ that reflects power imbalance, a situation which puts colonizer as a central figure while the non-West/colonized at margins. This theorization is important to this study since it informed my reading of how the bias infused then by this asymmetrical power relation translates to material and economical imbalance that overflows to the independent Kenya through neo-colonialism. The modern Kenya is haunted by such colonial and neo-colonial structures that have refused to die even with independence as the selected novels demonstrate.

The study also uses Genette’s theorization of narration and focalization to provide investigative tools to examine the dystopian narratives evident in the selected novels. Genette separates the two concepts; perspective (mood) from narrating agent (voice). However, to have a holistic and comprehensive approach, I utilized Mieke Bal’s approach that uses Genette’s frame of narration and focalization but with slight change in that it does not treat perspective and the narrating agent as two separate entities

but as which can be joined into one. She argues that treating “the agents of focalization and voice in isolation conceal the parallelism of the organization of the narrative” (279).

The research was also informed by the claims of the new narratologies which shift focus from the structuralist narratology which uses text-based models to the new narratologies that emphasize on both the text and context of the stories. Such approaches include: cultural-narratological approach as developed by Ansgar Nunning. Nunning’s approach synthesizes both the classical narratology elements with new perspectives that inform the content of the text such as the history and culture in context thereby drawing a relationship between the narratives and the culture that generates them. For Nunning, cultural narratology takes an integrated approach that puts the analytical tools provided by narratology to the service of cultural analysis of narrative fictions. This method provides a toolkit for a comprehensive analysis of the narratives under study.

Research Methodology

The study employed a close reading of Ikonya’s *Leading the Night* and Kibera’s *Beyond the Darkness*. I used a comparative reading of the two novels to interrogate how the novels narrate dystopia. The research also employed textual analysis to examine the narratives and arrive at the findings and conclusion of my research. I read secondary materials relevant to my area of study to gather collaborative evidence that helped to anchor my research. The study is also supported by electronic journals, newspapers and other literary articles that give insight to my study. I read materials on both the theory of the narrative and the postcolonial theory and practice to acquire investigative tools that helped to prop my research. I did a textual analysis of each novel at a time. Finally, I

conducted a comparative analysis of the two novels which enabled me to acknowledge not only the similarities but also the unique elements used in the two novels to narrate dystopia.

Scope and Limitation

The study confines itself to the reading of Ikonya's *Leading the Night* and Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* as the primary texts. The two novels allow a comprehensive examination of the narration of dystopia in modern Kenya. The study also references urban discourses that help build more on the reading and interpretation of urban dystopia and to capture the postcolonial disenchantments that characters in both narratives are always grappling with.

Chapter Outline

With reference to the structure of this thesis, chapter one provides a background to the study of dystopia in modern Kenya with close reference to the two selected novels – *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness*. Chapter two addresses the depiction of dystopia in Ikonya's *Leading the Night*. It examines how the narrator enlists the readers' sympathy and provokes the readers' wrath against the forces that subjugate the marginalized subjects. The chapter further argues that in the event that the marginalized subjects are denied a voice, they look for alternative modes of action that forces the mainstream society and the forces of repression to act.

In chapter three I have used Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* to argue that the postcolonial Kenyan state neglects the plight of the marginalized urban subjects. As a result, the situation triggers a necessity for alternative mode of action and behaviour that would of

necessity create an illusion of happiness and provide means to access the coveted material wealth. The chapter further argues that most of the chosen modes of action results to further entrapment leading to a vicious cycle of marginalization. This situation can only be broken if individuals confront the forces of repression using legitimate methods.

Chapter four takes a comparative approach to interrogate the authors' use of literary strategies to narrate dystopia and to project a social vision for modern Kenya. I argue that the writers of the two novels, *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness*, deliberately use literary features and language to create an atmosphere of dystopia and to suggest way out of the same.

The conclusion synthesizes issues addressed in the whole study and highlights what is achieved by the study.

CHAPTER TWO

DEPICTION OF DYSTOPIA IN IKONYA'S *LEADING THE NIGHT*

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Ikonya's novel, *Leading the Night*, with a view to explore how competing narratorial voices in the novel interact to construct a fictive dystopic atmosphere. The narrative integrates various points of view which, if read together and against each other, open a chance for an analysis to capture different moments in the novel that combine to realize the dystopic mood. The novel predominantly employs the omniscient point of view in the narration of the frame narrative while the first person point of view is largely employed in the embedded narrative. The different narratological aspects complement each other and help to create a dystopic mood.

The chapter also examines how the narrator enlists the reader's sympathy for the marginalized woman at the same time provokes the reader's wrath against the forces that relegate them to positions of dependency and subordination. Rika, the focalizer through whom most of the events unfold, exposes the plight of the woman pitted in a world too harsh economically, socially and culturally. The narrator depicts women as victims who have to strive harder to arch a niche in the society and to make their lives livable. Consequently, they engage in endeavours that hit back at the society thereby challenging the systems that subordinate them. Finally, the chapter examines how the characters mediate their ways in a seemingly failed state. The chapter pays close reference to the state's functions and the structures it has put in place. I argue that state's treatment of its citizenry highly shapes the lives of both men and woman within the state.

Plot

The story begins with the mention of two dancing snakes that arouse mixed reactions of fear and disgust in Rika, the female protagonist. Rika does not openly explain the meaning of the two snakes but as the story unfolds, one get to understand that the two snakes refer to the two rival gangs – that of the rich and the poor – that seem to control peoples’ lives. The gang of the rich comprises rich and powerful individuals who exploit the poor and disadvantaged in the society like the commercial sex workers. Rika, a journalist, undertakes to investigate the genesis of the wide material difference problem and the challenges that such exploited individuals go through. Her investigation reveals that majority of the urban populace are economically disadvantaged. Consequently, they engage in prostitution, crime or drug abuse in order to make their lives meaningful. Rika interrogates these groups of marginalized subjects to establish the predisposing factors to such conducts and suggests solutions. Her efforts are met by resistance from the rich and powerful individuals who benefit from the marginalized subject’s position. Although it is a dangerous and risky cause, Rika, through the assistance of a foreign journalist, Rei, pushes for the rights of these groups. At the end Rika wins a “Mandela Literary Award” for crusading for the rights of the marginalized groups and addressing poor governance.

A plot, according to Peter Barry is different from a story, in that a “story is the actual events as they happen whereas the plot is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged and presented in what we recognize as a narrative (223). Ikonya’s *Leading the Night* begins in a climatic note and constantly flashes forward and back, thereby

revealing and concealing certain information. This helps to provide dilation that creates suspense in the story.

The narrator binds the different narratives by recording them and creating a repetitive routine of issues being addressed in the frame and embedded narrative. This bond helps the plot to move forward and is important in narration. The repetition of these narratives allows the reader to make connections between different moments in the novel; hence, the reader can thus relate the events as they appeared in the past. As the same events are retold by the embedded listener, the reader gets to hear the perspective embraced by the listener not necessarily the story teller's perspective. For instance, Rika narrates the story of Wairi and Deni, who are commercial sex workers, from retrospection as was narrated to her during her earlier investigation. Thus, it is common to find Rika's view in the narration. For instance, Rika reports of Deni's desperation from her own subjective view; she compares the resignation she saw in Deni to the song of the toilet cleaner who sings:

Just do it

It will pass

And then I will get money, and one day

I will go, go, go, and go! (38)

This view, though embedded in Deni's narrative, reflects Rika's view which may be different from Deni's but it is clear that Rika empathizes with Deni's lament. At first Rika mentions Deni as a cautious woman who appears versed with the rules that help the commercial sex workers to survive the harsh business but later on Deni tells her own story revealing who she is and how she came to be a prostitute.

Wairi's story is first narrated through the omniscient narrator. The narrator reveals to us that although Wairi is married to Yaadi, she engages in prostitution. Similarly, the reader gets to see the narrator's perspective rather than Wairi's. The narrator says, "as soon as he left, she counted thirty two times. She quickly took off the rasta hair weave sewed on her hair, which Yaadi had never noticed as he never hugged or caressed her" (111). This view is subjective because we do not get to know Yaadi's view; rather, the reader is only exposed to the narrator's own opinion that Wairi's prostitution is pre-determined by her loveless marriage to Yaadi. The narrator remarks, "she too needed to have money and good time" (111). These remarks reveal the narrator's opinion which is later confirmed by Wairi herself during the interview with Rei. Although she does not openly confess that she engages in prostitution to enjoy herself, one can discern from her talk that the secret escapades not only create an illusion of freedom but also give her money that she so badly needs. Thus the two narratives, though narrated from different points of view, depict great interconnection of the events in the plot.

The ending of the novel binds the story together by resolving the conflict that the narrative had earlier created between the gangs and the innocent people who are their victims. The ending creates an aura of optimism when Rika wins against the gangs and thus she becomes an agent through whom positive change may be realized. Thus, the plotting of the text ties together the beginning and the ending which refer back to each other. As Peter Brooks argues in *Reading for the Plot* "the end calls to the beginning, transforms and enhances it" (94).

Mode of Narration

Ikonya's *Leading the Night* capitalizes on diegesis presentation of the narratives. Most of the actions take place in the mind of the central focalizer of the narrative rather than being acted. The actions are often realized in form of a series of interior monologues. The events are thus in a rapid panoramic, summarizing way. The predominant use of diegesis as the mode of narration denies the reader an opportunity to mentally see the re-enactment of events in a scenic view as if they are being re-enacted on stage; rather, the reader only gets to hear reports about the characters actions. As Genette theorizes, narrative fiction is best presented while the mimetic and diegetic parts are used concurrently within the narrative. Peter Barry, in *Beginning Theory*, argues that "mimesis and diegesis need each other" (232). Ikonya's *Leading the Night* however does not create a balance of the two. The text majorly exploits the indirect speech which is less mimetic because it arises from the reporting speaker. Therefore, the reader does not get adequate opportunity to interact with the affected characters. For instance, in the story of Magdalena, a young girl Rika encounters the narrator reports:

Magdalena, a young girl was worried about Rika. She kept inviting her to conversion on specific dates. She told her that the world was going to end one of those typical hot. January months [sic] when people in Kenya did not have money for school fees having spent all they had on Christmas and New Year. (63)

By using the reported speech, the passage subordinates the teller of the story. Consequently, the narrator's view is much felt than that of Magdalena and Rika who are affected. The narrative's employment of the passive voice undermines the believability of

the narrative in that sometimes the reader feels that the reports given do not reflect the characters' view. Rather, it feels like the author's voice is intruding into the narration and hence compromising either the narrator's or the focalizer's point of view as depicted in the following passage:

Seeking out faces on the streets Rei could see that Kenyans in Nairobi were often too engrossed in their own problems. They looked pre-occupied. **They** said some of them even forgot their homes in the villages (my emphasis 108).

One does not understand who 'They' refers to. Consequently, this omission creates a general feeling that the author is either deliberately denying the readers the information or the narrator unfortunately leaves out information that is crucial to the readers' understanding. The narrator's remarks are marred by inconsistencies and omissions. The narrative constantly uses the passive voice and fails to identify the agent of some of the actions. The narrator can thus be referred to as an unreliable narrator. An unreliable narrator, according to Rimmon-Kenan as quoted in Nunning's "Towards a Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches," refers to "one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect" (37). Kenan's definition is crucial here since it may help in resolving the ambiguities and textual inconsistencies prevalent in the novel. For instance, the omniscient narrator complains that the people do not want to know about the mutilated body. Yet the narrator does not define to us who the people are: "All this hit Rika hard; another mutilated body in the bush and people do not want to know. Her conscience was disturbed" (48).

In a separate incident, the narrator comments on the state of the exiled writers as if aware of all their challenges. The narrator argues that during revolutionary times, “It looked like the writer enjoyed living in exile anyway, since they got used to fast trains and did not return home where risks were unpredictable” (43). This view is one-sided and does not give us the view of such writers mentioned as Ngugi wa Thiongo and Micere Mugo. In addition, the narrator creates an impression that the country is in a state of turmoil and the state does not give the writers a chance to voice their dissatisfaction.

The narrator is inconsistent in naming institutions; for instance, the narrator introduces us to the “Jazeera TV” (1) but as the novel progresses she refers to it as “TV Jazeera” (4). Thus the reader can only infer that the narrator is referring to the same TV channel. The narrator also uses different spellings interchangeably to signal the same referent. For example, “Africa” and “Afrika” are interchangeably used so that the reader is left at an ambivalent position on whether to handle the two homonyms as semantic equivalents. Because the narrative offers no details to help resolve this lexical dilemma, the reader is left with the illusion that both refer to the same continent which is Africa. Sometimes the narrator fails to clearly reveal vital images so that the reader gets a sense that the authorial voice is trying hard to “fix” real events that have affected and defined Kenya as an “actual” geo-political formation into the fictive Kenya of the narrative. For example, the narrator fails to establish fully the cause-effect dialectic while explaining about the men who worked for the “dancing snakes” (1). Although the “snakes” are signaled as venomously destructive, the reader does not get to know specifically how and why the “snakes” that had great venom and determination to destroy and kill on behalf of those

they worked for relate to the central thematic of corruptive destruction that inheres in the narrative. The narrator says:

In Rika's eyes now, each one of the men on the screen is a glittering snake charming the other as venom swells on both their necks. She stares at them. She can see that they are coated with tantalum – acid resistant and long lasting – and they are ready to bite, poison and kill for those on whose behalf they work; but not before some dancing to charm the world. (Sic 2-3)

From this statement in the opening of the narrative to the very end, the cause-effect relationship is ignored by the narrator so that the reader is only presented with events that depict action but none that directly relate to the motives behind the actions.

To involve the audience in the already complex narrative, (at least in clearing the object-subject link), the narrator frequently tries to woo the audience using the second person perspective “you” in the narrative especially while focusing on issues that have a Kenyan – national face which the narrator seems to have established as an empathetically shared space. This notion created tries to woo the reader to identify with issues that collectively affect the Kenyan people which the narrator is part of and wishes that the reader should join. The second person position is crucial here because as Mildorf argues “it draws us into the story as we inevitably identify to a certain extent with the ‘you’ addressed in the narrative, the text therefore implicitly creates an audience for itself” (47). As Mildorf correctly points out, once directly addressed as ‘you’, the readers [unwittingly] become part of the audience in the text and they are provoked to assess the events being narrated.

For instance, in describing Rika's reaction to the faces of the two masked men in the screen, the narrator tells the reader:

if you were very close to her, you would see her round nostrils gently rise and fall as she breathes in and out. You would hear that her breathing says she is fed up but her nose tells she will not stop. (1)

The second person pronoun 'you' in this case draws the reader closer to the narrator so that the readers feel as if they are being summoned to witness the anger and the bravery that Rika experiences. Despite the fact that the men referred to are acting on behalf of other larger forces beyond Rika's control, she has a daring spirit that will push her to fight with such forces.

In other instances, the narrator uses second person address so that the readers feel that they are part of the narration. This is evident when the narrator uses pronouns such as 'we', 'our' and 'us'. In the section titled "The dance"(3) which addresses colonialism as theft of Africa's "beads" (3), the narrator constantly uses these pronouns thus creating an effect that the reader understands the African "beads" stolen behind their back and how the songs representing African culture were almost annihilated. The narrator says:

But Rika knows. Their dance is like no other. It is choreographed by those who stole all African beads behind our [sic] backs and gave them to the two snakes to decorate themselves. They were also given all dances to dance without song. (3)

The narrator calls our empathy with Rika's predicament by the use of pronoun 'we' which creates a sense that the reader as the audience should understand and can identify

with Rika's predicament. The narrator says, "But now we understand her shock for this is real life in Nairobi that she is looking at" (4). Yet, it is not lost to the reader that the narrator uses "those" to refer to colonialists very closely with "they"—the neo-colonial snakes with whom the "we" must distance from. What emerges is an atmosphere of dystopia into which "we" are drawn as helpless agents pitted against the malevolent forces of "those" who once robbed "our beads" with impunity and who have now conferred their destructive forces to the poisonous "snakes."

Embedded Narratives

Narrative embedding is a recurrent motif that helps to bolster the dystopic atmosphere in *Leading the Night*. This motif draws the reader's attention to a fictive Kenya which is described as a country that is heading in the wrong direction in almost all spheres. The situation becomes clearer when put in the perspective Manfred Jahn's theorization of narrative embedding. Embedded narratives, according to Mieke Bal, arise when a story within a story is created in a narrative. Manfred, quoting Bal, argues that:

Story telling can occur in different levels...puts it that there are "tales within tales . . .one such circumstance arises when a character in a story begins to tell a story of his/her own, creating a narrative within a narrative, or a tale within a tale. The original narrative now becomes a 'frame' or 'matrix' narrative, and the story told by the narrating character becomes an 'embedded or hypo narrative' (Bal 1981a: 43)

Ikonya employs various embedded narratives which are all interconnected in that they address related issues as the frame narrative thus sharpening the focus of the frame narrative. Wairi's narrative, contained within Rika's narrative, provides an exposition of Wairi's life. While major actions in the novel take place in the mind of the central focalizer (Rika) or are reported, Wairi's life history is presented in the first person narrative technique. The author employs a dialogue between Wairi and Rei, the foreign journalist. Thus the reader gets the opportunity to meet with Wairi whom Rika, the focalizer, had narrated about. The dialogue reveals the insecurity that has characterized Wairi's life and those that she represents. She is nervous at the thought of being caught by Yaadi during her night escapades. Wairi is yearning for freedom and this yearning is revealed in her strong desire when she says, "that is why I would like to go to *America*. I can find freedom there. I hear it walks on the street there, freedom. I too would like to dance with freedom" (168). This statement further reveals that Wairi is aware that prostitution only enslaves further.

Wairi not only yearns for freedom to assert herself away from Yaadi but she also yearns for freedom from all the mistreatment she receives from him. She constantly receives beatings from Yaadi but she does not have the courage to fight back. Through this enacted dialogue, one can feel Wairi's struggles and her determination to reject disillusionment that is her life. Wairi's narration unfolds through a homodiegetic narrator thus creating a proximal distance that allows us to access how Wairi receives the mistreatment. Her speech is short and made with finality as evident in the dialogue between her and Rei:

“Where do you come from Pica?”

“A village called Gitina Giathina; [sic] it means the bottom of poverty or trouble”

“Where is that?”

“Do you know Mount Kenya?”

“Just below it”

“How are your parents?”

“I do not have any, am an orphan”

“Any brothers or sisters, uncles and aunts?”

“I have none”

“You are alone in the world?”

“Yes.” (167-168)

Arguably, Wairi’s remarks portray her as a strong person who does not seek sympathy but one who has learnt to live with the everyday existential problems which she hopes to surmount but lacks the means to do so. The emotive voice is used to narrate all the ordeals she experiences in Yaadi’s hands. She narrates:

Just two nights ago he came back all of a sudden in the middle of morning. In the early morning, we had argued over his shirt, he wanted a blue one and I was so *sreepy*. I gave him a *brlack* one. The light was weak. He cut me up with razors on my upper arms; I can show you that another time. He would makes lines of three, look at me and laugh and make three more. I did not cry. My eyes are dry but I was very scared (167-168)

Wairi's case reveals a resigned spirit of one who has seen worse and expects nothing. It is clear from her speech that even after speaking out her struggles to Rei, she does not expect much help from him. She only states her desire to go to America as if it were unachievable wish rather than a strong desire that she has always hoped for. The physical movement would provide her an opportunity to not only assert herself but it also underscores a psychological freedom.

The fact that Wairi does not consider herself married reveals her private thoughts which she dares not reveal to the public. She only considers herself as a silent bride whose only use is to cover up for Yaadi from the authorities. She considers herself caged, yet she does not possess the means out of this bondage. The background details of her life reflect the struggles in her life. She tells Rei that she comes from "Gitina Giathina", which means "the bottom of poverty or trouble" (167) and that she resides in Korogocho "The rubbish estate" (167). The name acquires a connotative meaning while translated as it reflects assorted and rubbished people who reside in "Korogocho." They are poor and helpless individuals who, surprisingly, are able to stand the rubbish and the degraded environment that is their home without themselves acquiring the rubbished status that the neighbourhood presumes. This is unlike Wairi's lowly status that has been predetermined by the village of her birth, "Gitina Giathina" which mirrors the poverty that has shaped her life since birth.

Wairi's lack of knowledge on the geographical location of abroad and what comprises it reveals that she has scanty or no formal education. She imagines that everywhere people speak English is America. The massive mother tongue interference that she exhibits

reflects her low level of education. She cannot pronounce basic words such as America (AmerlikKa) (166), blood (blond) (167), sleepy (sreepy) (167), and black (brlack) (167). Wairi's lack of formal education denies her an opportunity to free herself from Yaadi's exploitation since she lacks the means and the knowhow.

Wairi's narration reveals that she is an orphan. Given that she has no blood relations that she knows of, Wairi can only stick to Yaadi and hope that one day her struggles will come to an end. The embedded narrative thus helps to reinforce female subjectivity that Ikonya castigates through the narration and also provides evidence on Rika's claim on female subordination. If we go by Barbara Stern's position that the I narrator "is assumed to be true because it is candid revelation of the self's deepest concerns in front of an audience to whom the character has no reason to lie" (11), then it would enable one to see how, through first person narrative voice through which Wairi narrates her own experience, the narrator becomes more empowered by owning her life and accepting her role in its outcome so far. Her re-narration and thus a re-telling provides therapeutic platform that helps her to recuperate. In this way her version of the story is invested with greater authenticity and believability which has been compromised by the seemingly ideologically interested omniscient narrator.

The narrator, through Rika, reveals the genesis of Deni's misfortunes. Through her, the author questions how Deni meets her death. Rika emphasizes the tragedy that is Deni's life by mentioning the tender age at which Deni is a commercial sex worker. At thirteen she is the youngest commercial sex worker that Rika has ever met. By mentioning Deni's tender age, Rika emphasizes her age of innocence. Ironically, Deni's conscience is not

innocent as she has involved herself with prostitution which is a vice in the society. Rika questions this society that ignores the plight of its children by closing its eyes while the young are helplessly preyed upon by the ravenous and the rapacious in its midst. The resignation and helplessness is captured in Rika's song:

Just do it

It will pass

And then I will get money, and one day

I will go, go, go, go, and go. (38)

By alluding to the song of the toilet cleaner, Rika's song intensifies Deni's helplessness, bitterness and resignation. Just like the prison toilet cleaner, Deni has to engage in prostitution to eke out a living.

Deni's story acts as a microcosm of the untold stories of other commercial sex workers such as Mercy and Mwangaza. She meets an untimely death at the hands of her male clients. It is through her life that the narrative presents the plight of commercial sex workers and reveals some predisposing factors that lead girls to prostitution. Deni's story thus acts as a voice for the commercial sex workers demanding to be heard and understood. As an embedded narrative, it reinforces the nature of female subjectivity and limited agency that Ikonya addresses in the frame narrative.

Female Agency

The novel *Leading the Night* is told from the female perspective; therefore, we do not get a chance to hear the affected males' point of view. On the whole the narrative thus

appears biased against men in that it does not give an objective view that would allow the reader a chance to interact with the male voices it displaces in constructing an eternally injured female subjectivity. It depicts women's lives as circumscribed by oppressive conditions that work to relegate them to subordination such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation and prostitution. It would be fruitful to explore how the narrative manages to lure unsuspecting readers to view the female subject in modern Kenyan as still bound by over-aggressive patriarchal forces that are blind to the plight the women.

Prostitution and Subjectivity

The discourses surrounding prostitution and other sexual activities deemed socially deviant offers one way of reading how this apparently gendered narrative indicts patriarchy. The perception and treatment of commercial sex workers by the society, the church and the law enforcers is biased against women. Women receive harsh judgment unlike their male counterparts. Rika argues that the society condemns female prostitutes and leaves out the male partners, participants without whom prostitution would be absent. She puts forward questions that many female victims in the narrative ask themselves but lack proper channels to convey their disappointment:

Are men not part of this profession? How can this be a female profession?

Are men not to be seen as employee in this case just because they phone or they go out looking for the girls? They normally have some little money to throw at the girls, for long hours of entertainment. (25)

The news editor at The Sabat News however views Rika's sentiments as "feminist" (25). He views her as unjustifiably defending the female prostitute. The editor's attitude exposes the general misconception about prostitution that dismisses the commercial sex worker as an outcast oblivious of the factors that lead her to prostitution and the challenges that she goes through. However, commercial sex workers, being the socially sanctioned central players in prostitution, understand the hatred and venom that the society has towards them. They have limited choices to turn to and prostitution to them is a means of livelihood. For example, Deni has no education or professional skills that would enable her get a good job; as a result, she turns to the streets. Similarly, Wairi turns to prostitution as she does not have professional skills to get her a good job. For Wairi, prostitution stands out as the only quick and sure method to get quick money without being discovered by Yaadi.

To survive onslaught from the society, the commercial sex workers work in solidarity and protect one another. This way they share in making each other's life livable. For instance, Rika overhears Deni warning other girls against the danger of denying charges in court. From experience, Deni has learnt that accepting all the charges whether legitimate or illegitimate gives a commercial sex worker a lesser fine and a chance to continue providing for and protecting her children. She has also learnt that it would be in vain for a commercial sex worker to stand up to fight for her morality. Rika's eavesdropping reveals the plight of the commercial sex workers. The reader sympathizes with their helplessness but admires their solidarity and spirit to move on and face the world that rejects them. For example, Mercy, a prostitute consoles them saying "we shall one day

beat these hyenas at their own game. Do not expect justice here where they never charge the men of robbing us with violence which they so often do!” (35). The “hyenas” symbolically refer to greedy, insensitive police officers who are easily manipulated by the rich and powerful to protect them once they defile the girls. Such acts deny the girls opportunities for equal access to justice. While the male prostitute is set free, the female prostitute is held responsible and punished.

The prostitutes look for ways to be heard by the mainstream society. For example, they insult men who fail to fall into their traps. Fundi explains to Rei that, if he resisted all the ‘girls’ desperate appeals, they would have called him names to see him get angry with them just to get him emotionally involved (219). This suggests that commercial sex workers appear to use any opportunity within their disposal to hit at the men who refused to fall for their traps. The opportunity to abuse gives them the illusion that they have power over the men.

The commercial sex workers also hit back at the society by throwing away babies that are conceived in these illegitimate and illegal businesses without any remorse. Mwangaza gives Rika her opinion on prostitution. She says “these animals are too busy dumping on us bundles of irresponsibility not joy! ...we throw them far out, Ku! Ku! Ku! We call them nyuguta!” (61). Mwangaza appears callous and unfeeling as she narrates this to Rika. Plausibly, she reflects other commercial sex workers’ attitude towards the children conceived in such illegitimate relationships; the male partners whom Mwangaza refers to as animals have no concern about the repercussions of their actions. They leave the responsibility on their female counterparts. The female prostitutes on the other hand see

the children born out of these relationships as a burden that they can readily get rid of without remorse. Although the narrative tone sets the male as the source of all female troubles, it is worth knowing that protective measures would prevent conception in the first place. In fact the outlook is to blame for the death after STIs. Therefore, the female commercial sex workers are also to blame.

The story of Deni exposes structures that undermine and marginalize the position of commercial sex workers. Denied an opportunity to enjoy her childhood and her right to education by the people she trusted most, Deni resorts to being a commercial sex worker. She harbours so much pain, bitterness and anger against the teacher who defiles her at age of ten; worse still, to the parents who desert her when she needs them most. Her parents threw her out when she was five months pregnant because they could not bear the magnitude of shame. Three years later, the anger, pain, bitterness and shame of being pregnant has not subsided; she still seethes with anger and bitterness as if it is happening now. She reveals to Rika that although she has forgotten the pain of childbirth, she has never forgotten the pain of being pregnant.

Rika discerns the pain in the voice of Deni and she observes that “it is as if she became pregnant forever” (37). Even after the birth of the child three years back, Deni still harbours so much bitterness and pain. The passage of time does not alleviate the pain inflicted by the rape and the subsequent challenges she goes through. Rika visualizes and paints vividly the naivety confusion and helplessness that Deni experiences given that she is just like a baby herself. She has neither the knowledge of how to deal with her bulging

stomach nor of how to wade in the adult world that harshly judges her as evil and eventually alienates her.

Deni's song further reveals this naivety, pain and disillusionment that follow her pregnancy. She sings:

Teacher you teach me present tense,

What presence is here? What is really here?

Teacher you teach me past tense

Teach me past tense, what past is this?

I know I am past.

I told you my uncle abused me

You forced your turn to explain. (37)

Deni has since resigned to her fate; she is bitter with the teacher for ruining her past and prospects of a bright future. The song castigates the societal structure that sidelines the plight of the innocent young girl caught in the claws of an aggressive rapacity. Rika asks pertinent questions after listening to Deni's song which raises other questions on the society's communal role in Deni's individual subordination. She asks, "what future was here indeed? Was Deni born to be an object of male abuse all her life?" (38) The questions that Rika poses provoke the mind of the reader thereby exposing the filth in the society and the disillusionment that Deni faces. Rika suggests that Deni is making of her environment and that her fate has indirectly been shaped by the harsh realities that she encounters at her tender age. The psychological toll on Deni is partly an avenue which may help readers grapple with Deni's violent predisposition which leads her to kill men

with broken glasses when they attempt to abuse her in the slum bars. She harbours so much anger and bitterness that has build up with years of suppression and oppression. Arguably, it is a way of expressing her dissatisfaction, bitterness and anger at the society that subjects her to suffering and subordination. Thus, Deni's purged emotions give vent through such acts of killing and thereby providing a paradoxical delusory recuperative impression.

The church, the school and the family are three institutions that should serve the needs of the disadvantaged people like Deni without prejudice. Unfortunately, it is both at home and school that Deni is "robbed with violence" (39) and her hopes for a better tomorrow is rudely cut short. Surprisingly, her mother, although is aware of psychic damage inflicted on Deni by her husband through rape, she remains silent on the issue. We do not know about the relationship between the father and the mother but it is clear that the hushing up of the crime provides loud undertones of a subordinated and controlled woman who dares not act against her husband. She seems to have internalized a distorted notion that a woman's worth is measured by overt submissiveness to her husband and by how much she is able to sacrifice her own image in constructing her husband's own. Charles Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" may be instrumental in understanding such distorted images of the self:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition in its absence. Often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, to the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non recognition

can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression imprisoning someone in false distorted and reduced mode of being. (25)

A cautious appropriation of Taylor's argument on identity politics helps reveal how Deni's mother's act of 'non recognition' of her daughter (by positively hailing the rapacious husband) and by her conscious refusal to stand by young Deni, ends up positioning Deni in a precarious state at home – of having no one to mother or father her.

The school, on the other hand, vulnerably exposes Deni to sexual exploitation. There appears to be no proper mechanism to protect the plight of an abused girl like her. The school administration silences the avaricious acts of the teacher who rapes Deni and he goes without punishment. Self-interest comes first for the school because it fears that admitting to having predatory teachers within it gives the school a bad name.

Likewise, the church, in its vested interests, concentrates on dubious spirituality without spiritual therapy or ethical intervention. It thus lets the human wolves in the fold prey on the defenseless members of the flock such as Deni. Thus her father and the predatory teacher go scot-free. With the failure of these institutions that Deni trusts so much, she succumbs to despair and disillusionment. Consequently, she develops a seething anger and a strong desire to revenge against the complacent society. Thus her murderous bent and the unfeeling prostitution of her own body may be seen as acts of vengeance and mockery to society respectively. It is Deni's way of assuming agency in a callous world, albeit limited.

As Rika shows, the psychological turn down in the sex-worker's life is never too far. The commercial sexual worker is constantly gripped by the fear of her security and uncertainties of being denied her pay. For instance, Rika tells of Mwangaza's unstable life as a commercial sex-worker whose heartless male clients drove a cold broken bottle in her body and failed to pay her. Mwangaza does not raise alarm nor does she fight back. She seethes in pain in a resigned state. Rika also highlights other cases of female prostitutes ambushed and mutilated by their male clients and their bodies eventually dumped. However, to her shock and disappointment, she can do nothing as a journalist to probe or castigate such crime stories because her office would not dare reveal or go against the forces that perpetuate such intimate crimes.

Rika investigates the silenced stories of the underprivileged commercial sex workers. Nonetheless, her narrative must circulate within the same censored environment. Indeed, the narrative gains its force by exposing and mocking the hypocrisy of the journalistic form which it appropriates as a framing device while at the same time showing how the strictures of repressive media can be circumvented. Rika and other enlightened female groups for instance appear as the only hope through which such structures can be demolished and new structures that are socially sensitive and inclusive put into place.

The inclusion-exclusion dialectic informs how characters see themselves in the society. The narrative reveals that the exclusion of the commercial sex workers from the social context leaves them with feelings of despondency and shame and thus they do anything to avenge their despair and frustration. Rika cites an example of a tycoon's daughter who schemed against her own father. With the help of other prostitutes, the daughter enjoys

humiliating her father to the point that he dies of shame. Not once do they regret their act. In fact, they enjoyed their newly acquired power to control and humiliate him.

At times, married women engage in prostitution to exemplify their search for freedom from the abusive marriages. For Wairi, for example, prostitution not only gives her the illusion of freedom from her abusive husband Yaadi, but it also provides her a chance to save money that she hopes to one day use as her ticket to freedom from her bondage. Her sexual escapades without her husband's knowledge trigger mixed feelings both in her and in her husband. To start with, she is excited at the thought that she is able to outwit the beastly Yaadi and hit back at his cruel treatment. She applies make-up cosmetics on her face and at night dresses to foreground the femininity that is barely acknowledged by Yaadi even during the day. Her face gleams with laughter that no traces of abandonment are visible. Her nights out also give her an opportunity to interact happily with fellow call girls. Unlike when she is in Yaadi's shack, Wairi gains an opportunity to express herself freely. It is during these night outs that she appears to experience life. As Rika puts it, Wairi "too needed to have money and a good time" (11) arguably what Yaadi has denied her. Moreover, the nightly sexual escapades provide the possibility of temporarily and eventually working her way out of Yaadi's bondage. She saves her income with Mama Flava and fantasizes that she might be fortunate to meet a rich white man who would help her leave the country. Basing her vision on popular discourse, through many stories she heard, Wairi plans to go far from Yaadi that even with his gang power he would not reach. This way, she would get a chance to bring up her children to become professionals.

The power of willing and imagining the self to freedom is unmistakable in Deni. Yet that power keeps a self-questioning mode in that though sexual escapades do on the one hand have a clear encounter with freedom, on the other hand such freedom arouses the fear of being caught. This intensifies the despair and the need to break loose from her caged life despite the realization of the limitedness of chances.

The circumstances circumscribing Wairi's life have denied her the privilege to choose how, where, and whom to interact with. She consequently wishes that she were a "matatu" (152) so as to exercise these choices. Wairi also feels that she has been denied the power to disobey and punish anyone who plays with her life. If she were a "matatu" she contends, she would punish anyone who does not agree to her terms by breaking into a wreck. This wish denotes a strong impulse to revenge and vent out the repressed emotions of bitterness. Because of this dispossession and disempowerment, Wairi cannot help but engage in prostitution if only to hit back at Yaadi and the society that judges and alienates her.

Wairi may appear as an unfaithful and discontented woman, but she has many reasons that drive her to engage in night escapades. First, Yaadi does not marry her out love but to satisfy the requirement of the gang. In effect, he does not touch her except while beating her. It is thus clear that the cult allows him to do bodily harm to his wife and to demand total submission from her. He at one point cuts her using a razor for talking back to him. Understanding the limits of her choices and thus her helplessness, Wairi does not attempt to fight back. She accepts every humiliation with a bitter silence which benchmarks her submission. Wairi also understands the futility of trying to share her pain

with the other similarly situated brides and she opts for the stoic silence which is physically safe but which she recognizes as psychologically damaging. As she observes, “Yaadi did all that he wanted with my body. I remained silent. Cursed be this silence. It is a cursed silence” (169). Her later sexual escapades thus appear justified as it is a reaction against oppression. It is a way of asserting and convincing herself that she is still human just like others in her circumstances and whose narratives underscore their entrapment.

Such is the story of Maya and her mother which reveals how both are enticed by the love for good life that they desire but never attain. Although Maya’s mother appears driven by necessity to engage with the Lukiimam brothers, she displays a strong impulse to satisfy her ego that was barely contented by her husband who was once rich but mean. The Lukiimam’s generosity thus becomes a constant reminder of her financial incapacitation and the pain suppressed over the years specifically inflicted by her husband’s meanness. Her actions can thus be interpreted partly as being driven by the subconscious urge to revenge the non-recognition she experienced from her husband.

To make herself visible, Maya’s mother takes to extremes because doing so offers her an opportunity to exercise power over the Lukiimams and thus assert herself without any moral considerations. Maya and her mother appear as daredevils ready to seize any opportunity to gratify their financial needs through extortion of money from the rich. Through the sexual clout they believe to possess, Maya and her mother degenerate into monsters that use their bodies to control men. In the end, the very politicians whose behavior they hope to challenge become part of their lingo. They form the pimp cartels and become brothel owners who, like the assumed political antithesis, subject the woman

more to prostitution. The fact that Maya remains the hyperbolized envy of society's role models becomes the narrative's way of inviting queries about her means of acquiring power and wealth while at the same time sustaining a critical gaze at societal complicity:

Many students in school thought Maya was great, when she told them that one of these men – now she had a hard time proving which one – was her boyfriend.

“This girl is bright and daring!” Said one of her male teachers.

“And she cares for her mother's plight!” Added the headmistress.

The teachers agreed she was a role model even if she was doing poorly in her test.

(20)

It is clear that the poor groups, like the teaching middle class, are ready to embrace any endeavor that will bring an illusion of happiness, be it licit or otherwise, except that that they lack the opportunities and means like Maya and her mother.

Rika sympathizes with girls and women whose bodies have been made constant sites of pain. Through direct speech and retrospection, Rika reproduces narratives of pain told to her by the girls at the community center. The girls exhibit built-up anger, frustration and despair for having undergone circumcision “cut” which is symbolically used as an act that also cuts short the subjects' aspiration. For instance, through the first person experiential and witness voice, one of the unnamed girls recalls how their education was cut short to validate an apparently ugly, retrogressive and repressive cultural rite. She vividly describes the painful ordeal that she and other girls endure. Casting the crudity and the pain of this one-off cultural ratification and its ensuing life-long consequence, the narrative seems to underscore that female circumcision and the debate that surrounds it

go beyond the temporal pain which goes away, but it extends to the realm of the psycho-social which the mutilated body is just symbolized as similarly mutilated. As she shares her pains and frustrations, the girl weeps uncontrollably and vows that her children will never endure that.

Therefore, through the first person narration which centers this girl, the novel enacts a politic of activism that seems to suggest a social vision that extends beyond the narrated world. The reader as an outside-the-narrative-audience is passionately called to go beyond the characters' capacity to act outside their limited vents of anger and suppressed bitterness. This interpretive "calibration" is what Ato Quayson calls "reading for the social" and it requires the reader to "embrace the ideological notion of using the literary as a means toward social enlightenment" (xv). Linking the narrated world and the reader's own, the narrative discourse suggests a close linkage between literature and society and their coterminous nature. Here the narrative uses a fictional personal narrative to gesture critique the society. Maya's narrative points towards Barbara Stern's theorization of the nexus between what she calls the "personal" and the "general". For her:

The first person perspective is commonly used to express personal values and attitudes, reveal ultimate feelings, describe moods or mind state, and/or simply muse aloud about life in general. (11)

The female circumcision or the "cut" subject only gains relevance in the "social" which validates it and which it ironically haunts. Thus, through the girls narration, the society's

celebration of the one-act cut is called into question since, even with the passage of time, the narrative does not envision any restoration since the scar of the healed wound (physical and psychological) only makes meaning in the context of the original pain. Thus the retroactive cultural evidence of growth and maturation of the new woman paradoxically references itself to re(tro)gressive rites and bodily violence of the old. The narrative depicts utopia as a glimmer of hope. And, even then, it does seem gendered in that it can only be realized in the terms set by the narrative: if and when women break away or overstep the boundaries set by patriarchy.

Narrative Rescue of Dystopia from Semanticist

The narrative, though principally modeled on dystopia as a negative force also engages in a discourse of redefining the boundaries of dystopia from being seen as eternally negatively qualified. Even when society attaches negative value judgment to certain acts, the narrative uses bold characters who do not easily succumb to social pressure. Through Rika for instance, the author provides hope of reclaiming the position of women in the society so that they are not immutably bound up with negative cultural hegemonic. For instance, Rika re-imagines and re-writes the history of the women as one that involves the reclaiming and revisioning female roles from masculinity, patriarchal and sexist milieu. The narrative questions the society's image of the woman and challenges any unfitting portrayal. The narrator models Rika as a daring, unbowed, committed and principled heroine, who goes out of her way to challenge structures that relegate women to subordination. Rika is not ashamed of being associated with commercial sex workers like Wairi, Mwangaza, Rajua and others. She transverses the darkness (an insignia of the

dystopic) to narrate their untold stories and challenge the forces that subjugate them and hence the dark nights paradoxically provide the light with which to illuminate the society.

As a woman, Rika plays a major role in reshaping the fictive Kenyan national consciousness. Through her life, she deconstructs the negative image the society has formed towards women. She also challenges ethnicity which appears to complicate the lives of the marginalized Kenyans for they never see themselves as Kenyans but as members of their ethnic groups. As such, opportunistic politicians and selfish church leaders easily exploit these fractured and sentimental affiliations. Rika, as the voice of reason in the text, interacts with everyone irrespective of these predetermined social boundaries. The names of the characters that Rika interact with reveal a national face such as Mwangaza, Deni, and Rajua. The reader cannot tell their ethnic roots as the names are in Kiswahili. Rika thus stands out as a voice that the modern Kenya, which is the society of novel, ought to aspire to.

Rika also emphasizes the great roles played by women such as Mekatilili wa Menza who almost crossed the country on foot with the aim of uniting the people against the colonial masters. Mary Nyanjiru fought for the release of Harry Thuku, a freedom fighter, from the colonial rule. However; her role has remained seemingly unrecognized. As a fellow woman, Rika recognizes that history sidelines the woman in the making of the nation thus rewrites history to inscribe women's eclipsed significance. Though Rika's attempts are met with various forces to silence her, she pushes through bravely.

Male Subjectivity

In the traditional African socio-cultural set up, men were expected to assume the overall head of their homes and families. Boys were socialized in this belief and acted to it once they became of age. Men thus wielded more power than women who were relegated to the second position after men. The men's position thus granted them opportunity to exercise power over women. However, the changing economic situation and modernity overhauls the set traditional structures: the man ceases being the sole bread winner and he shares the duty with the woman. Consequently, his power to provide for the family reduces and his masculinity becomes radically questioned and demoted. Margrethe Silberschmidt in an article "Disempowerment of Men in Rural and Urban East Africa: Implications for Male Identity and Sexual Behavior" describes this situation that also applies to *Leading the Night* vividly. Silberschmidt argues that "unemployment or low incomes prevent men from fulfilling their male roles as the head of the households and bread winner. Women's role and responsibilities have increased these affect men's social value, identity and self esteem" (657). In *Leading the Night* Rika observes that men tend to mete out violence on women as a projection of their undermined masculinity. They engage in alcoholism and other escapist tendencies that seem to restore their masculinity. As Mbugua wa Mungai observes:

One thing that becomes sharply clear when talking to young women in Nairobi, whether they are matatu men or not, is their lack of self esteem. As has been argued throughout, when these youth do not measure up to the mainstream, patriarchal society's ideals of masculinity, they begin questioning their self-worth

as men. The resulting self-doubt might then translate into their engagement in self-destructive behavior such as drug consumption and membership to criminal gangs, so as to derive a sense of security and in part the phenomenon of youth drug addiction might be explained in this way. (212)

Yaadi lends himself to this theorization by Mbugua wa Mungai. Rika describes him as a hungry man pushing a dejected and tired donkey. He is poverty-stricken and lives in Mathare slums. As a means of livelihood, Yaadi brews changaa, an illicit brew. Yaadi understands his poor economic position and his inability to move up the economic ladder. He thus laments in his creed:

My name is Yaadi wa Chechege [sic]. I was born from the mountain and circumcised one early morning on the banks of river Nyaga. I was frozen cold but I did not wince: do you hear me? Snuff my tobacco I do, smell my tobacco I must, I Yaadi wa Chechege because tobacco gives me healing. Hey there brother, I sing for justice. Up there into my nose, do you hear me, and *a tishoo! A tishooo!* I sneeze and I feel faith in me. I face the mountain. Am not hostile, it is the world that is unbearable. I pray peace, I call it, *thaaai*. I must look for peace, *thaaai*. Peeeaaace *thaaai* for my brother have died *thaaai*. This is my dirge. My life is a dirge. The one I sing when I am alone and before we go to the ritual of the goat and at the river. I am only a human being! I will live only once! I was born only once! Circumcised once! *Haaaiya, thaaai*, bless my home, *thaaai*. All powerful one, listen just give us enough money, *thaaai*. We want to live like people do in the world outside of slums! (108)

From the above quote Yaadi acknowledges his lowliness as he is not “in the world outside of slums” which belongs to the “powerful”. Yet he does yearn “to live like” them. The simile here underscores the relative impossibility of attaining the goal. He feels emasculated and hence he recurrently cites his circumcision, his only mark of manhood. It is no wonder that marginalized people like Yaadi join criminal gangs to act out the manhood that slum-life threatens to erase. Yaadi is a member of gang that seeks restorative justice by ostensibly fighting for a second liberation of Africans: “I sing for justice... we want power. We are committed to principles for a cause!”(108) The cause refers to the second liberation. This liberation would see the gang members acquire access to justice, grant them and their children an opportunity to enjoy the good life, address unemployment, landlessness, corruption, poverty and poor governance that has plagued post independence Kenya.

Yaadi’s gang seeks a restorative vision of a past masculine freedom and power that was fought for but betrayed by the neo-colonial rulers who came at the moment of “freedom and after”. Yaadi’s energy is directed towards resisting Western influence and liberating the poor, marginalized subjects like him from exploitation and in demolishing structures that oppress them as revealed in the creed. It is thus clear that the poverty that circumscribes the marginalized male subject arouses the need for a second liberation and triggers his involvement with organized gangs. As one of the cabinet ministers argues in the narrative, the problem of the gang can only be solved if the state alleviates the social-economic and political problems affecting most people, especially the youth. The minister argues that joblessness among the youth is the main cause of the creation of

most of these gangs. The state, however, is blind to their plight. Most post-independence leaders in Kenya, as depicted in the novel, have vested interests that make them unable to address these issues. Consequently, the young men feel betrayed and so disappointed that they organize criminal's gangs which offers them hope. As Rika notes, initially, these gangs have clear objectives as earlier mentioned. However, individualism and greed for money sets in and thwarts their plans.

The gangs resort to violence, instilling fear and extortion of money as a means and strategy to survive. They create disorder, chaos and fear among the adherents through ruthless killing of defectors and members of public who seek to investigate the gangs' underground dealings. This violence instills fear and silence in the public. The police officers lack proper mechanisms to deal with such gangs and they resort to mass killings of young boys who are suspected to be members of the alleged groups. Fundi, a taxi driver who takes Rei to Murang'a, argues that the police lack knowledge of who the true members of the gang are. Thus, the killing of the suspected members does no good either to the public or to the gang. While mass killings erode the trust that the citizens have in the police officers, such executions strengthens the gangs who laugh at the state's inability to control them. Worse still, some police officers decide to join or support such criminal gangs to serve their own interests. Wairi explains to Rei that she fears being discovered by a police officer who might inform Yaadi.

By depicting the failure of both the state and individuals within the organized gangs, the author questions who the real enemy is. While the gangs like the Mungiki have so much hatred towards the West, their presupposed oppressors, the post-independence leaders

appear more responsible for the desolate state of affairs in the country. They possess so much wealth and power and show no commitment to bridging the ever increasing gap between the rich and poor. They possess big tracts of land while the descendants of the Mau Mau have little or no land at all. This disparity thus becomes a major trigger that informs formation of such criminal gangs. Yaadi's creed, as earlier mentioned, reveals his great obsession with land and remedial justice. He is an exemplary figure of the injustices subjected to the descendants of a Mau Mau that he represents.

Landlessness contributes to poverty experienced by people especially by the men who were the sole inheritors of land in the traditional African set up. Land is an agent for social change and economic mobility; the agent of social transformation within the society. As Frantz Fanon argues in *The Wretched of Earth*, "land is the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (34). Conceivably, much of the marginalization that Yaadi and the other members of the gang experience; are triggered by landlessness. They are disillusioned and they lack hope that their poverty stricken life is going to change given their economic position. Gang-life provides them with a leeway to vent their disappointment. They embrace fanatical teachings that hold the gang together and focus them on liberation. The fanatical teachings give them illusions that they are confronting their challenges. However, as Yaadi depicts in his creed, he is only obsessed with ways of creating livable lives for the gang. According to Kalmer Marimaa's "The Many Faces of Fanatism," individuals such as Yaadi and those he represents are fanatically true believers. He is a:

Frustrated individual whose frustrations impels him/her to join emerging, mass movements. Such individuals hope to deny their “self” because they see themselves as worthless failures and their lives as empty and meaningless. This lost self-confidence is replaced with faith in a ‘holy cause’ because of their presumed unworthiness they start to exalt their nation, religion, race, or “holy cause”. Such “holy cause” gives their lives meaning, worth and essence. They try to prove to themselves and others the worth of the “holy cause” through their willingness to die for it if needed. (49)

Yaadi is ready to die for the cause to change his life and to avenge the sins committed against him and his forefathers who struggled to liberate the country. The new struggle thus allows him a chance to recuperate. Nearly 50 years after independence, nothing much seems to have changed. The conditions circumscribing the ordinary Kenyans lives remain as they were immediately after independence. This stagnation is a signifier of a nearly failed post-colonial state, what Ikonya, in *Leading the Night*, engages with.

The Failed State

As interpreted in the novel, the state mirrors what Noam Chomsky, in *Failed States: Abuse of Power and Assault on Democracy*, describes as a “failed state.” Though Chomsky concedes that the term is contested, he highlights certain recognizable traits that frame “failed” statehood. He writes:

Though the concept is recognized to be “frustratingly imprecise,” some of the primary characteristics of failed states can be identified. One is their inability or unwillingness to protect their citizens from violence and perhaps even destruction.

Another is their tendency to regard themselves as beyond the reach of domestic or international law, and hence free to carry out aggression and violence. And if they have democratic forms, they suffer from a serious “democratic deficit” that deprives their formal democratic institutions of real substance. (1-2)

Through the various characters, Ikonya’s *Leading the Night* exposes the story of the nation as perceived by the marginalized subjects. The characters overtly and covertly depict mistrust of the state and its structures. The marginalized subjects, relegated by their economic situation to the peripheries of the town, do not appear to enjoy most of the structures laid by the state. The narrator exposes the insecurity facing major parts of the country where people are poverty stricken. The state appears to have no well laid structures that can protect the people from the mushrooming criminal gangs nor mitigate the growth of such gangs. These gangs such as Mungiki, as Fundi explains to Rei, are able to take control of even the police forces so that the citizenry is left on its own. Citizens live in constant fear and have no hope that their situation will change soon.

The state, in conjunction with rich and powerful individuals, denies the media freedom of expression; censorship of news is common. Rika laments: “the men with money were said to be capable of completely crushing a newspaper or media house and putting it out of business” (44). As such, many journalists agree to be manipulated in order to safeguard their jobs. The state censors news that would taint its otherwise good image to the public. For example, Rika reveals that many journalists who do not remain quiet on the issue of the militia gang are harassed and silenced. Each journalist dreads receiving calls from the “Big man” (9). Journalists have to act according to the “Big man’s” wishes

and interests. The gangs, on the other hand, also wield so much power that they also censor what the press should say about them and when. Rika reports of her fellow journalist who was harshly confronted by the militia gang for revealing what she had not been instructed to reveal. She says:

The leader now called the office, the editors shivered in fear. The leader insisted on speaking to her and called the land line that had a strange tone. He spoke to her for only half a minute. He warned her to always do as the gang told her otherwise the consequences would be dire. (48)

The Lukiimams on the other hand use power to buy and threaten journalists. Rika reports that once Luukimams failed to buy all journalists to cover them the way they wanted, they would storm the media house with guns and kill them. Yet Luukimams received power and protection from the state. Arguably, the inability of the state to curb such gangs is what contributes to the mushrooming of other militia gangs as each seeks to protect its own interests. The poor and the marginalized subjects who live in slums not only endure the insecurity in their cramped neighborhood, but they also endure the pain of recognizing that it is their own sons and daughters who inflict pain upon them. Rei cites a case that he read in an article of an old woman lamenting how she lost her hearing as she was forcibly circumcised by her son and his gang. By presenting the grim situation in the country, the author, through Rika, satirizes the meager efforts instituted by the state in fighting the militia gangs. She presents the state as unwilling to address issues affecting the citizenry.

As Chomsky theorized the character of a “failed state,” the fictive Kenya in *Leading the Night* also appears to be lacking the willingness and the ability to control and mitigate terror attacks. Due to compromised security structures, terrorists take advantage to instill fear in the public. The author quotes a real event that claimed the lives of 257 Kenyans in the 1998 August bombing. The narrator reveals her disappointment with the state’s weak policies that do not see to the victims’ compensation. The Americans spend more financial and military resources in hitting back at Sudan and Afghanistan. However, they hardly compensate the victims of the blast.

Although one may acknowledge the economic and military disparities between Kenya and America, Kenya must be gauged by its seemingly half-hearted willingness to peruse justice for its citizens; and by assuming that Kenyan citizens under the attack should be remedied by American justice system since America was the primary target while Kenya was simply a collateral damage factor. Ironically, the Americans fail to empathize with the affected Kenyans because American judicial systems are still guided by a colonial mentality that Edward Said describes as “Orientalism”. Said postulates that the West/colonist demarcated the world into a duo polarity – the East (the orient as uncivilized) and the West (the occident as both civilized and civilizing) and thus the two cannot be subsumed within similar systems of remediation. In this dialectic, the West defines themselves as superior to the non-West/colonized. The American West and its behavior in this incident lends itself to Said’s theorization in that American justice system does not feel burdened by the tragedy nor does it see its duty in correcting the damage.

At the local level, the narrator cites a case of the Kenyan leaders using state power to protect hooligans such as the two criminal brothers that Rika refers to as the Lukiimam. This event points to a real event that took place in 2006 when two Armenian brothers visited the country and aroused questions and suspicion from members of the public. The narrative uses the self-censoring anagram Luukimam to avoid direct attack to the concerned parties. However, it is clear that it refers to “Mamluki” (Taifa Leo June 28, 2006) as the Armenian brothers were referred to then. Just like the Lukiimam wield so much power and use it to threaten the public, the Armenian brothers popularly known as Arturo Sargasyan and Artur Margaryan, wielded much power that they threatened the police officers with guns at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport yet nothing was done by the state. In fact, the then leader of the political opposition, Uhuru Kenyatta said that the two were visitors of the state (Birenge, 16).

The narrative alludes to the story of the two Armenian brothers to mock the state’s negligence in protecting its citizens from such criminals. Such disappointment forces the youth to form their own gangs that would protect their interests. Unfortunately, they too are infiltrated by the selfish politicians so that the youth are eventually used to serve politically vested interests. In return, the political personalities would provide protection.

Rika argues that the politicians are more dangerous than the gangs themselves. While the politicians benefit from the organized gangs, most of whom are from marginalized spaces, the gang members hardly benefit. They have to hide from the authority in fear of being executed. In addition, gang leaders and their followers have to bear with dehumanizing existential conditions. For instance, Yaadi and his fellow gang members

live in congested and degrading environment. As Yaadi claims, he is among the descendants of the Mau Mau fighters who are landless. Landlessness becomes one of the major triggers of conflict between the rich individuals with big tracts of land and the landless gang members. As Ayo Kehinde observes, in the works of Meja Mwangi, (and the case applies to *Leading the Night*), the land issue still persists. Kehinde argues that:

Although the independence sought in Mwangi's *Carcass of Hounds* is ultimately achieved, nothing tangible has happened to the resolution of the crises of land tenure. The economies still reflect the interest of the imperial power and the associated dominant groups. New forces and new ideas come to the fore presaging major social and economic changes. (4)

Yaadi's creed, earlier quoted at length, gives credence to Kehinde's view. As a member of the gang he confesses that, the members want nothing short of what their forefathers fought for, land.

Rika points out the state's failure in implementing policies that would protect commercial sex workers; she also questions the possibility of legalizing prostitution. She argues that should that happen, the commercial sex workers would have a chance to voice and negotiate the terms that would favour them from exploitation and mistreatment. However, Rika's view is debatable. Donna M. Hughes argues in *Prostitution: Causes and Solution* that "illegalizing does not reduce prostitution or trafficking; in fact, both activities increase because men can legally buy sex acts and pimps and brothel keepers can legally sell and profit from them."(2) Although this endeavor appears difficult to implement, the state in *Leading the Night* does not provide even the basic assistance that

is within its means. The state is unable to provide security against male exploitation from pimps, brothel owners, organized gangs and corrupt officials. Owing to the disrespect and condemnation they receive from the society, sex workers take the exploitation and the mistreatment silently.

In conclusion, the narrator in *Leading the Night* paints a picture that the state uses oppressive apparatuses to the disadvantage of the poor. In effect, the poor are economically, socially and politically marginalized and do not have a voice. However, the marginalized subjects always look for alternative mode of actions to make themselves heard. Throughout the narrative, Rika persistently attempts to expose the state's machineries that oppress the citizenry. Her success at the end is a suggestive pointer that gradually all will be well.

This chapter has examined how Ikonya's *Leading the Night* reveals the notion of dystopia by interrogating the various facets of the society. The discussion singles out female and male subjectivity, and failed states as the major underlying challenges that create dystopia in modern Kenya. However, through construction of model characters like Rika, the narrator demonstrates the possibility of the marginalized subjects transcending the forces of repression. The next chapter investigates how Ngumi Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* narrates dystopia. It pays emphasis to the role of the social, economic and political environment in creation of dystopia vis-à-vis the role of the individual in overcoming despair and disillusionment.

CHAPTER THREE

DYSTOPIA IN KIBERA'S *BEYOND THE DARKNESS*

Introduction

This chapter examines the portrayal of dystopia in *Beyond the Darkness*. It explores how the author narrativises the social economic and political marginalization that circumscribes lives of the marginalized subjects in Kenyan urban spaces. The chapter argues that squalid existence and relative impossibility of marginalized urban subject in accessing social amenities forces them to gravitate towards violence, crime, drug abuse and early marriages as strategies of achieving livable lives. The chapter further argues that the postcolonial Kenyan state, as imagined in the novel, ignores the plight of the marginalized urban subjects, consequently, triggering a necessity for alternative mode of articulation that would create an illusion of happiness and provide means to access the coveted material wealth. Moreover, the chapter argues that the author constructs characters to narrate how disarticulated subjects can transcend the social economic forces by depicting that the greatest challenge to overcome the social economic hardship lies within an individual's character and it is not necessarily imposed on them by their geospatial location of the character.

Plot

Beyond the Darkness begins with a prologue and introductory paragraphs that identify the setting and give expository details of what the reader should expect in the narrative. The prologue uses the omniscient narrator's point of view. As an observer, the omniscient narrator gives a detailed description of the environmental degradation and decay that

surround the shanties in the narrative where most actions take place. The prologue ends in a cliffhanger that whets the readers' appetite on what the text is about to offer. The opening paragraphs that stretch from page two up to four expose the dreadful and deplorable living conditions typical of Kenyan urban slums as the ones mentioned in the narratives.

The introductory paragraphs also introduce the contesting social, economic and political forces that shape the lives of the slum dwellers as evident in the narrative. The omniscient narrator begins by painting a picture of the city as a space that offers "easy fortunes" (2) to the new rural immigrants who run away from what the narrator perceives as "rural drudgery" (2). The glamour of the city lures the new migrants into the belief that they undauntedly stand a better chance of transforming themselves from the unpleasant and constraining rural life into "the landed gentry, complete with shoes, suits suave mannerisms and all"(2). Unfortunately, their ambitions and dreams are immediately shattered at the realization that, in the city, they are unqualified even for the few jobs available. They are further devastated by the growing realization of the prevalent capitalist tendencies that make the earlier migrants hesitate in inducting them to "the new city life" (2). The narrator captures this despair in a vivid description:

Then before they could absorb the shock, another devastating blow followed. Their urbanized hosts, scandalous as the thought was, had grown bloated: they no longer revered the age-old custom in taking kinsfolk in as part of the extended family...they had no intention of accommodating free loaders forever. (2)

The shock that all they wished for is unachievable aggravates the grief and bitterness. Frustrated, they resort to residing in the shanties with the hope of reconstructing their broken lives. The shanties, however, do not resolve their miseries; rather, they intensify the futility of their attempts to run away from “rural drudgery” (2). With the increase in the number of the migrants, the pressure on the land and other social amenities builds up thereby triggering violence and animosity among the residents. As the narrator reports, the shanties become the home and the hide out of choice for thugs and criminal gangs, and a source of cheap labour for the factories. The introductory passages thus provide a snippet view of the issues the narrative will address as the plot unfolds.

The novel reveals the presence of two major subplots with each taking its own perspective; the story of Jeff and the gangsters, and that of Jacklin and her children. Both subplots provide the framework for the central plot of Gloria and her struggles to overcome the challenges in Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley. Thus, Gloria’s story can only gain meaningful interpretation in relation to what happens to Geoffrey (alias Jeff) and Jacklin respectively both of whom are the focalizers of the two subplots embedded in the frame narrative. While Jeff and Jacklin are entangled in the social, economic and political mesh affecting most of the valley residents, Gloria triumphs through resilience and hard work. She pursues education against many odds and she transforms her life and that of her adopted family. Jacklin, on the other hand, gets married to Jeff; a *matatu* driver cum-gangster who later abandons her and their children once it is discovered he is a thug. Jeff is finally shot dead after fourteen years of hiding. Jacklin suffers greatly after her husband deserts her. Her riches dwindle away such that she cannot even afford to

maintain her two children Erica and Tony in school. Tony involves himself in drug abuse and he finally runs away while Erica opts to drop out of school because her mother cannot afford to pay for her education. All options spent, Jacklin finally decides to seek help from Gloria and her mother.

The plot of the narratives is structured to create an aura of cause-effect dialectic. A character is either rewarded or punished depending on whether they engage in the accepted code of conduct. This is depicted in the way the narrative resolves the conflicts raised in the plot. The narrative resolves the conflicts so clearly that the reader easily identifies the characters' actions and the reward or punishment they receive. Those who succumb to anti-social behaviour such as crime and drug abuse to confront the hard social economic conditions are punished whilst those who positively strive to challenge the forces are rewarded. For instance, Jeff, Mess and Isaac are punished for their engagement in crime while Gloria is rewarded for her resilience. Thus, the cause-effect dialectic helps create a moralistic ending thereby rescuing the dystopia created at the beginning of the novel. Gloria's success and struggle is symbolic of the logical and legitimate ways that the marginalized subjects of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley can use to confront the forces that repress them.

The story ends with an epilogue that appears after the end of the main plot. The epilogue refers back to the prologue by re-visiting the same issues and the mood of despair set in the beginning. In fact, the epilogue appears as a continuation of the prologue which brings the story to a close. The epilogue creates a feeling that although some efforts are put in place there is insignificant change in the social economic status of the residents in

the valley. The river is symbolic of the life of the slum dwellers of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley. Just like the river moves on relentlessly and unobtrusively without much effort to mitigate the coming of the chaotic end, the life of the slum dwellers is characterized by critical social economic hardships that drive them to an untimely and deadly end. This is evident in the lives of most valley residents such as Jacklin's father, Tony, Nduati, Man Mess and others whose actions are largely influenced by the lowliness of their social economic status.

The narrative predominantly uses the overt omniscient narrator who poses as an observer and reporter. The narrator delves into the thought processes of the characters and reveals to the readers the fears, joys, aspirations and wishes of the characters. During the narration, the narrator intrudes into the narration by constantly commenting on the characters, characters' actions development and the circumstances of the act of narrating. Hence, most of the events are presented from the view of the narrator. For instance, in the opening paragraphs of the novel, the narrator comments on the police brutality:

Such was the value for human life in Mukuru wa Rukungu that, like a tiny pebble thrown into the sea, the ripples of outrage soon settled. And as the secret records in the governments safe were to show years later, the raids amounted to 'nothing but genocide by a police force, more in urgent need of overhaul than re-training'.

No wonder the valley residents reasoned in a fatalistic way: "At least they (the thugs) kill us one at a time."(4)

The narrator gives the view that the brutality of the police officers had driven the residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley to behave and conduct themselves in a

“fatalistic way” (4). The narrator also suggests that the state is so disinterested in what happens to the residents of the valley that they do not hold the police officers accountable for their actions. As a result, the residents of the valley have to bear the brunt of the officers’ actions. The narrator’s perspective appears subjective but can be validated by the presence of similar incidents in the narrative. For instance, during the harambee, the police officers indiscriminately attack a crowd of people gathered for the harambee with the allegation that they are disturbing the meeting. Many are injured and others are killed like the young baby whose head is smashed with a club. The police officers, however, are not remorseful for their action. In fact they send the wailing mother and her dead baby away and the meeting proceeds uninterrupted.

The narrator repeatedly describes the residents of the valley as “a poor, honest-to-God lot eking out basic subsistence” (3). This description creates a feeling that the residents have been marginalized by forces beyond their control and that the narrator sympathizes with their plight. The description further reveals the hard struggles they go through as they seek means to livelihood. The repetitive reference of the residents as “a poor, honest-to-God lot eking out basic subsistence” (3) in the narrative heightens the residents’ marginalization and their helplessness. The subsequent sentences betray the narrator’s view that due to the hard struggle that the residents go through, the society should not be shocked to find individuals engaging in anti-social and criminal activities. The narrator says:

but as luck would have it, it was also home for the blossoming number of underground criminals equally keen on staying alive and not particular about the

means. The proximity of the valley to the rich hunting grounds of the city, three miles away, and the crowding made it a hide out of choice. (3)

The narrator also comments on the sacrifice evident among the residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu. Despite the hardships they are going through, they still can afford to give out money as acts of charity to fellow valley dwellers. The narrator reports to the reader that: “it was not every day a man parted with a hundred shillings in the valley willingly. Even the most gentle of muggers had to clobber their victims to within an inch of their lives before they ‘gave’ ” (94). The commentary emphasizes the magnitude of sacrifice exhibited by the poor residents of the valley when they donated money towards Gloria’s education. The narrator’s comment also helps to heighten the betrayal felt by the residents and the distrust that develops towards corrupt state officers like the chief. Gloria and her adopted mother’s reaction towards the chief expose their pain:

“You used me,” she screamed, trembling not knowing what to do with her shaking hands, “cheated people that they were fund-raising for my education then stole the money! They fund-raised for me chief! *Me!* Proud to see one of their own succeed!” Then just as suddenly, the anger was gone, and an air of weariness and resignation sweeping over her until she just wanted to curl up and float away to sleep.

“You betrayed their trust,” she said quietly, staring beyond him as tears streamed down her face. (99-100)

The conversation exposes Gloria’s bitterness that her hope to pursue her education has been shattered by the selfish chief. Gloria is bitter that the chief used her to extort money

from the residents to satisfy his greed. Her resignation is an indication of how helpless and disillusioned she, and others like her, are.

The omniscient narrator employs enacted dialogue to support character's actions or speech. This is evident when Gloria receives a letter confirming her scholarship. The narrator cedes the power of narration to the characters to speak out their despair and resignation. The narrator first reports the observation in the introductory sentence and then allows the characters to talk:

But the joy mellowed quickly, and in inverse proportions to her mounting anxiety as she started counting the number of things she was yet to do in only two months.

"But you said it is twenty-sixth of August; why sound as if it is tomorrow? Her adopted mother remarked.

"Mum, I don't have even a passport!" Gloria wailed. Then after that I have to take a visa, take an English language test, get the 1-20 form-oh, God! And all that depends on showing them proof that I have airfare. Where am I going to get it? Oh, mum, I'll never make it!"

"...Still you shouldn't worry so much child," the lady said for lack of anything else to say as Gloria stared at her.

"*Shouldn't?* But this is perfectly the time to worry! Unless there is something positive from the ministry or the embassy soon, I may as well forget about it.

"Stop panicking child! You will make it," the old lady snapped now, angry at her own impotence. (88)

The enacted dialogue emphasizes Gloria's and her adopted mother's despair that they cannot afford the basic requirements. Gloria's excitement about the scholarship immediately fades once she realizes the basic requirements are far beyond what she can afford. The enacted dialogue reinforces the mood of despair earlier created by the narrator's speech. A similar mood of despair is revealed in the re-enacted dialogue between Jacklin and her daughter Erica:

“Mum,” said Erica quietly, her eyes on a crumbling charcoal unseeingly. “I don't want to continue with school. I'll start helping you at the stall.”

“No Erica! No!” she screamed, shuddering out of her reverie, and Erica shrunk back, frightened by the strange brightness in her eyes.

“Put on a better dress!” Jacklin said sternly, “we are going somewhere. *Now! Now!* (360-361)

After seeing the financial challenges they are experiencing, Erica decides to drop out of school to ease the burden on her mother. However, this is not a welcome move to her mother who has sacrificed so much to see her educated. The dialogue uses direct speech to enable the characters speak out their mind. The reader thus gets to see the characters' perspective on the issue in question. For instance, Erica's voice reveals finality in her resolve to drop out of school. Her mother's voice on the other hand reveals her shock at the realization that things have run out of hand and her daughter is about to sink into the same mess as she had years back; thus her finality in the abrupt decision that they have to go back to her mother. The speech tags reveal the characters' emotions at the time of speaking. Generally, the re-enacted dialogues enrich the tellability of the narrative. The

events in the narrative appear in a scenic way as if they are being acted on stage. In addition, the readers get the opportunity to listen to the characters' speech and compare their point of view to that of the narrator.

The overall attitude of the narrator towards the characters is one of empathy. Although some characters like Jeff engage in actions that call for condemnation, the narrator presents their thought processes to reveal that they are not happy about their actions hence wooing the reader to empathize with characters rather than condemn them. For example, Jeff is always tormented by the memories of his abandoned family. He always looks forward to a second chance to reconcile with them. Even if he does not achieve this, the reader empathizes with him. Through this depiction, the narrator highlights the human face of a criminal like Jeff; that above all he is an ordinary human being, a father and a husband. For this reason, we ought not to judge him harshly.

The setting of the novel covertly reveals the hard and hostile human conditions that the residents of the valley are pitted against. Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley is located in a dilapidated and decaying environment besides the banks of the "poisonous" (1) Nairobi River that carries the industrial effluence and the raw sewage from the factories' backyards. The shanties are close to one another, leaving dark alleys that form the hunting grounds for criminals. Their shacks are made from any locally available material collected from the factories' backyards. Basic institutions and structures such as schools, hospital, police stations, toilets and roads are hardly available. In addition, most residents lack professional skills that would enable them opportunities to meaningful means of subsistence. The setting thus reveals the hard social, economic and political conditions

with which the characters have to confront in their everyday lives. The residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley can best be referred to as “the wretched of the earth” as theorized by Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. They are marginalized and for this reason they constantly find themselves violently engaging the forces of repression.

Significance of the Setting and Economic Factors in Creation of Dystopia

Beyond the Darkness reveals that dystopia is partly a result of poverty and marginalization. Dystopia in the novel is manifested by the portrayal of characters in deplorable and hostile environs. The characters are in a state of helplessness and are disillusioned by the harsh turn of events around them. In the introductory paragraphs of the novel, the narrator exposes how the economic conditions force the rural poor to move to the ostensibly greener grounds in the city. The narrator begins with a vivid description that juxtaposes the rural drudgery with the supposedly bright city life. The juxtaposition creates the impression that there exists a strong force and desire among the rural residents to move up the social ladder. The narrator describes the urban life in lofty and optimistic tone thus raising the anxiety and the expectation the new migrants imagine of. This exaggeration foregrounds the impact and the magnitude of loss once their hopes and dreams are shattered.

Contrary to the new migrants’ expectations, they realize that they do not possess the required professional skills that would enable them to access job opportunities nor can they access help from their relatives who reside in the town. The relatives are not ready to accommodate them because they have been influenced by the capitalist tendencies that are now thriving in the city. All options spent, the new migrants despair and resolve to

settle in the shanties like Mukuru wa Rukungu. The narrator informs the reader that, “embittered and doubly scandalized, the new immigrants retreated to the bosom of the desolate valley to lick their wounds, and to re-align their shattered expectations with this new sordid reality” (2). As the passage reveals, even before the migrants settle in the deplorable shanties, they are already disillusioned and bitter.

The shanties promise little hope to the new migrants as evident in the case of Jacklin’s father, Munyua. His wife narrates to Gloria the challenges Munyua encountered in the valley since he was twenty two until his murder. Having run away from his warring brothers in their rural home, Munyua resolves to live in his aunt’s home. The aunt mistreats him and eventually throws him out. Munyua finally settles for a lowly job of a watchman. Jacklin’s mother belittles the job citing it as “the lowest” (59). This observation suggests that Munyua took the job opportunity for lack of a better choice. The remark also creates an air of resignation. Munyua’s disillusionment is captured in her description of him as humiliated and demoralized:

So finally humiliated and demoralized, then thrown out altogether, he settled for the lowest job as a watchman at the soap factory. And on the very same day, he moved to Rukungu Valley, his change of clothes and his mother’s passport-size picture his only earthly possession. (59)

The placement of this description in the topic sentence of the paragraph sets the mood of despair and resignation. The mention of Munyua’s extreme poverty in the subsequent sentences builds on the despair and helplessness earlier created in the topic sentence. The

narration ends by Gloria's adopted mother cautioning her to work hard. She tells her, "that is why I keep on telling my Jacklin to study hard and leave the valley but I don't think she listens to me. It's not the place for her – or for you either" (60). Her words hint that she has already given up leaving the valley and only hopes that her children will manage to. She believes that it is through education that both Gloria and Jacklin can gain the means to leave the valley. However, she feels that having lived so long in the valley, there are no possibilities for her.

Jacklin's fate after her fall from riches turns out almost as her father's. She is so humiliated and frustrated that she alienates herself from the rest of her family even when they have offered to help her. Her children are so affected by the poverty that Tony rebels and involves himself in crime and drug abuse, while Erica befriends Fundi, a *matatu* tout who, by the social standards, is considered as lowly. The news that they would be evicted by the landlord because of not paying rent becomes the last blow to the family. The omniscient narrator delves into Erica's thought process immediately she gets the news that they are being evicted. The narrator suggests to the reader that the news becomes the last blow that forces Erica to decide to get married to Fundi. The narrator says:

Her mind drifted to Fundi, now twenty-five. He had been buying her a number of expensive things which she dared not wear lest her mother grew suspicious. And as if knowing it, he had started giving her money instead which she had been spending quietly, adding to the provisions in the house carefully so that the mother could only remark how well things were lasting nowadays. Then recently,

in apparent warning that he was not waiting forever, he had started flirting with – of all people – her friends.

She sighed heavily and the mother looked up from her own thoughts, unaware that her daughter had just made the decision to get married, with or without her blessings. (360)

The reader empathizes with Erica's situation for she is about to make a serious mistake as her mother had done when she was in form two. Erica is sure to replicate her mother's life given that the boyfriend is economically unstable and sexually promiscuous. Jacklin's decision to seek assistance from her mother rescues Erica from her impending marriage which would most probably have ruined her life.

The narrative gives the picture that poverty is a catalyst for crime especially among the youths in urban areas. The male youths in the slums are more vulnerable to anti-social behaviour than their counterparts from well to do families. Maina, the flower seller, turns to crime because the flower business gives him little income which barely meets his needs. Maina takes advantage of Jeff's misfortune and decides to be their "host- cum- landlord" (42) and to run errands for Jeff at a cost instead of being in the hot sun the whole day wrangling with unwilling buyers. Maina's case can best be understood in the line of what Odhiambo in "Juvenile Delinquency and Violence in the Fiction of Three Kenyan Writers" observes on the vulnerability of young men and their tendencies towards crime. Odhiambo argues that, "it is inevitable that many unemployed young men added to the rising numbers of the urban poor and disadvantaged resort to crime and

violence as a means of accessing material goods” (134). Maina’s conduct gives credence to Odhiambo’s theorization on youth’s vulnerability. Although the narrator does not mention Maina’s direct involvement with crime, it is clear that Maina knows so much about the underworld. He is well informed about who is who in this world and also how and where illegal businesses are carried out. This is evident in the dialogue presented between Maina and Jeff:

“After Eastleigh, this is probably the hottest place for illegal pieces,” he whispered.

“Why, they sell them as well or what?” Jeff asked casually, and again, Maina studied him thoughtfully before nodding.

“Use them, sell them, hire them out – but like I said, you have to know whom you are dealing with. You could buy a piece only for the same guy to go ratting on you to the police, or come robbing you, most likely silencing you in the process.”(45)

The narrator appears to be unconsciously unmasking Maina as an undeclared criminal who is well versed in criminal activities and who would exploit any opportunity so long as it promised money. The narrator suggests that Maina would gladly lend a hand to Jeff if need arose and he would go to an extent of hiring for him a gun if he deemed it necessary; some sort of “recommendation into the brotherhood” (45) as Jeff refers to it. The narrator presents Maina as knowing so much about the criminal world, leaving an impression that he can only be a criminal to know the secrets of the gangs.

Through the narrative the reader discerns that the residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu understand that it is hard for a young woman to succeed in such a deplorable environment as their valley. However, it comes as a shock to them that Gloria has managed to pursue education against many odds. The narrator comments that Gloria's success, "was enough oddity to avoid early pregnancy while clinging to books" (94). Through authorial intrusion, the narrator informs the reader of the knowledge possessed by the gathered audience that Gloria's success was an isolated case of resilience and hard work not known in the valley. The young service man at the bureau also confirms this when Gloria fails to fall for his trap as expected. He had been cocksure that Gloria would fall for his trap as was normally the case with such deprived girls. Gloria's ability to succeed against monumental odds is an indication that the deprived and marginalized subjects have the ability to transcend the social and economic challenges should they be optimistic and resilient as Gloria is. Gloria's success is symbolic of hope. It is also an indication that although poverty causes despair and disillusionment, an individual's character determines how they respond to the social economic challenges.

The narrator does not, however, fail to cast blame on the state's negligence on the plight of the marginalized subjects of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley. The narrator presents the state as having failed to put in place structures that would enable the residents to overcome their economic hardships. In the introductory paragraphs the narrator provides a general overview on the relationship between the residents of the valley and the police officers. The narrator comments that under ordinary conditions, the police officers held

the valley with contempt such that they were never concerned with what happened in the valley. The narrator describes the valley as:

A valley that the police feared with fervour only matched with the contempt they had for it. And no amount of heart-rending or earth-shaking calamity would draw them until public outcry at their inaction threatened their own survival. When such times came, as they did occasionally, they took no chances but descended on the valley in numbers, visiting their fear and fury on the criminals and the innocent alike, the young and the old, mowing them down in one fierce blitzkrieg.

(3)

This description portrays the police, as a state apparatus, as violent and ruthless. They combat the residents without any regard for their innocence or guilt, age or health conditions. The narrator ends by making a generalization that with such disregard of humanity from the state agents, the residents have no choice but to engage in subversive and cruel conduct which in turn affects the other residents of the valley. The narrator says, “no wonder the valley residents reasoned in a fatalistic way. “At least they (the thugs) kill us one at a time” (4). The narrator’s comment draws readers to share the belief and observation that the state agents are to blame for the conduct of the residents. The narrator describes a similar incident that occurred during Gloria’s harambee when the police officers indiscriminately attacked the residents injuring many and even smashing the head of a young baby with a club. The police officers are neither remorseful nor does the chief attempt to stop them. While the area chief wants to assert his power and that of his office through the incident, the police officers want to express their contempt and

instill fear among the residents. The fact that the audience neither fights back nor reacts at this injustice indicates their helplessness and despair.

The chief abuses his office such that in the end the residents do not see the value of the presence of the police post in the valley. Surprisingly, the state neither punishes the chief for embezzlement of Gloria's money nor the police officers for their excessive use of force on the crowd. In fact, the chief is recalled and re-instated in another area. The chief's betrayal of trust and the state's support of the corrupt and irresponsible chief kills the last ray of hope that had been rekindled by the presence of the chief's post in the area. The young men resolve to revenge over the chief's and the police officer's misconduct by engaging the police officers in a protest the whole day and forcing them out of the valley for good. Senechale de la Roche refers to such violent engagement with the police forces as "collective violence" (99). Collective violence according to him, is viewed as a moralistic response to deviant behavior but it takes its force when viewed as "popular justice" (99). It can appear in the form of lynching, rioting, vigilantism and terrorism. Although it can be described as scapegoating in that it does not specifically apply to the person who particularly violates the victim's rights, it gives the group an opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction. Senechale de la Roche defines collective justice as:

a byproduct of macro structural disruptions or strains such as urbanizations, unemployment or competition – conditions that are said to frustrate or otherwise pre-dispose individuals to aggressive behavior. (99)

Senechale's theorization on collective violence gives insight to my interpretation of the underground criminal gang's conduct. One gang persistently attacks Gloria and her

mother while another sacrifices to provide protection for them until they leave the valley. The gang's attack on Gloria and her adopted mother evokes the reader's sympathy at the same time provokes anger towards the criminal gang. However, the narrative clearly exposes unemployment and poverty as some of the underlying factors that trigger such conducts.

Beyond the Darkness reveals that the state fails to lay structures that would benefit the residents of the valley. Such structures as schools, clinics and roads are overlooked and not seen as pertinent organs of enabling social stability. As a result the residents do not access essential services that would help them transform their lives such as education and healthcare. As evident in the narrative, most of the residents possess little or no education that would give them an entrance to formal employment. Consequently, most of them turn to crime. As Odhiambo suggests in "Juvenile Delinquency and Violence in the Fiction of Three Kenyan Writers", the post colonial government is to blame for the anti-social behaviour that the youths engage in. In his study on the fiction of John Kiriamiti, Meja Mwangi and John Kiggia, Odhiambo argues:

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 postcolonial Kenyan state to "include" these young men(and women) into the mainstream of society.(1)

Odhiambo's theorization is given credence in Kibera's novel by how the lives of Mess, Ahmed and other petty gangsters who terrorize the residents of the valley turn out.

The police officers, like their leaders, are driven by selfish interests. Crime thrives under their watch as a majority of them are corrupt. For example, when Isaac Ngunjiri, an illicit brewer, is arrested, the intelligence officers express their readiness to make the case easier for him if only he gives them some payment in return. Ngunjiri is only arrested because he fails to comply. With the prevalence of such corrupt state officers, the poor people are the only ones who bear the burden for they do not have the financial ability to bribe their way out. The narrator exposes dystopic mood by showing that the state officers together with corrupt and crafty individuals participate in selfish endeavours which impact on the society negatively.

The Role of an Individual's Character in Creation of Dystopia

The narrator in *Beyond the Darkness* covertly and overtly helps the reader to recognize the ills in the society. The narrative reveals that individual characters in their struggle to run away from forces that repress them end up trapping themselves in the very mesh that they attempt to escape from thus triggering despair and disillusionment in their lives. This happens when an individual character's choice of actions consciously or unconsciously spirals out of control and ends up haunting them. This can be well interpreted through Bill Ashcroft's view of utopia and dystopia. Ashcroft describes such actions as utopia gone sour. He theorizes that utopia can degenerate into dystopia given that both are separated by very thin lines (8).

The narrative reveals that character's individual choice of action mostly hinges on both sides of utopia and dystopia in that one character's utopia at times result another character's dystopia or the character's utopia to envision new worlds slips into to realm

of dystopia. A good example is Jacklin's choice to elope with Jeff. Even if it promises a better future than the drudgery of Mukuru Wa Rukungu Valley, it is only fleeting and short lived. Jacklin at first enjoys the quick riches but once Jeff's mask is uncovered Jacklin's fortunes dwindle away. Jacklin does not know how to confront her new status and she isolates and alienates herself from her old friends and family. She secretly moves away from the house given to her by Steve, Gloria's fiancé, without informing anyone. Jacklin's action is motivated by the self-pity she experiences and the fear that her suffering is so open to her mother from whom she had run away for Jeff. Jacklin exhibits bitterness and self-hatred because things are running out of control. However, running away only compounds the situation for her and the children who find it hard to cope with the new status and they become rebellious.

The narrator depicts Jacklin as naïve in such a way that the reader at times dislikes her naivety. Jacklin is so naïve that she is easily tricked by the mechanic. The mechanic removes the distribution cup and tells her that she has a knocked engine. Jacklin neither sees him remove the cup nor does she realize that something has been removed; after all she could only make out a mass of wire connections. Throughout the episode Jacklin is presented as rash and naïve such that the reader fails to identify with her. The narrator says:

All she knew was that she had parked the car outside Kenyatta Market and gone to a hair saloon that two hours later when she came back, the car would not start. Hard as she tried it, all it did was make clicking noises and display strange lights on the dashboard.

Finally frustrated and frightened as darkness approached, she climbed out and opened the bonnet, absurdly staring at the assembly of metal and wires, with no clue what to look for. (301)

Jacklin is so dependent on Jeff that once he deserts the family she cannot handle most issues by herself. Consequently, Jacklin sells the car at a throw away price. Surprisingly, she does not realize that she has been tricked nor does she think of an alternative solution to her broken down car. Jacklin' appears so naïve that the reader is not surprised that she is tricked twice. Most of Jacklin's challenges thus stem from her inability to confront situations accordingly. She moves from one tragedy to another and she almost breaks down at the end.

Jacklin's narrative is juxtaposed with that of Gloria. Although both of them face almost similar social and economic challenges in their childhood, Gloria is able to confidently confront them. Born to an illicit brewing and an alcoholic mother, Gloria has to struggle with her school work amid the sexual advances from drunken customers. Her mother, as Gloria narrates, sees no value in her education and always looks forward to a time when she will become of age to help her in the business. Worse still, she does not protect her from her male customers who harass her because most of the time she is too drunk to realize what is happening to her daughter. Eventually Jacklin has to run away from home to escape this harassment and a near rape. Gloria succeeds at the end but she has to overcome serious financial challenges. Hers is a story of resilience and hard work, arguably what other girls like Jacklin lack. The two juxtaposed narratives disclose that it is possible to overcome the social economic conditions that define the slum residents'

lives and that the difference lies in how individuals confront the challenges. While Jacklin falls into further despair and disillusionment, Gloria transcends the social and economic challenges and gains the power to assist herself and her adopted family. Gloria hence stands out as a symbol of hope that all is possible.

Juxtaposing Jeff's nuclear family alongside Munyua's reveals that individual characters have the ability to cultivate hope or despair. Munyua illustrates this by failing to succumb to crime although he is more economically disadvantaged than Jeff. Jeff on the other hand involves himself in crime despite the fact that he received a hefty inheritance from his father. This affects his personal life and that of his nuclear family. At a personal level Jeff is not happy; he lives with the fear that the police will arrest him. As a result, he flees from his home in Karen and thereafter lives as a fugitive until his death fourteen years later. Although Jeff seeks pleasure in alcoholism, he is always haunted by the memories of his family which he has since abandoned. The narrator emphasizes Jeff's guilty conscience by presenting his inner turmoil every time he is attracted to Sarah. Jeff frequently invokes Jacklin's name an indication that he is disturbed. The memories of his family haunt him so much that at last he does not want to see or think about them. He rationalizes that they would reject him.

The children must be almost adults by now, he mused, feeling a spasm running through him, leaving his jaw clamped tight...what would they feel if they saw him now – assuming they could still recognize him? Contempt? Shame? Warmth? Certainly not; that was long dead and buried. (342)

Jeff's flow of thought reveals that he is tormented by the guilt of abandoning his family. The passage of time does not lessen their memories nor alleviate his guilty conscience. In fact the passage of time only increases his guilt. He feels that he initially stood a chance to re-unite with his family but at the present the family would neither like to see him nor be reminded of him. This emotion is well captured in the rhetorical questions. Jeff wonders whether they would feel contempt shame or warmth towards him. This reveals that Jeff has given up the hope of ever re-uniting with his family and it is also a vivid indicator that he has never been happy since he deserted them. Although the omniscient narrator clearly highlights Jeff's dilemma, the reader finds it hard to identify with his plight given that he does not seek reconciliation with the family.

At the family level, Jeff initially appears to be a loving and caring husband and father. He dutifully takes his role as the head of the family by providing, caring and protecting them. The reader can discern that he has strong attachment to his children and wife. The abrupt change in his character can thus be attributed to his fear of being arrested and a selfish impulse for self-preservation. Jeff's despair can thus be attributed to his being ego-centric. He prioritizes his individual pleasure over his family's happiness such that at the end he feels alone and lost. Jeff is symbolic of other men who engage in criminal activities; just like Jeff, they are ego-centric, self-opinionated, ruthless and greedy. However, as the narrative demonstrates, they can never win over the good forces. The narrative demonstrates this by punishing criminals such as Isaac through imprisonment, Jeff and Man Mess through death, and others through mob justice. The punishment of criminals in the text projects a moral vision that crime does not pay. More so, it helps to

rescue the overly dystopic mood created by the narrator in the prologue, epilogue and throughout novel.

As the narrator vividly describes Gloria's mother's negligence, the reader gets the impression that she is irresponsible. To begin with, she laughs at Gloria just like the other drunkards do. Secondly, she does not protect Gloria from the abusive drunkards. Consequently, Gloria feels hated by her mother so much that when she is welcomed by Jacklin's mother, she does not go back to her biological mother. In fact, all her life, Gloria finds it hard to identify with her. It takes her adopted mother's effort to convince her to even visit her biological mother in hospital. According to Gloria, "her real mother died six years ago in *her heart*, and since then, she had desperately held on to her new identity" (80-81).

Although the two women face almost similar economic challenges, Jacklin's mother constructively confronts the challenges unlike Gloria's real mother who takes to alcoholism. The consequences of the different choices they make directly affects them and their families. At the end, Gloria's mother is disillusioned and regrets that she has wasted her life and the chances of ever being with her only daughter. On the other hand, Jacklin's mother is happy and contented. Although hers is a long struggle, it is worth the sacrifice. She not only leaves her flimsy shack that she had lived in over the years but she also manages to hold her family together at the end.

Steve, Gloria's husband, acts as a foil to Jeff. Both Jeff and Steve are from well to do families. However, Jeff wastes his father's wealth and finally engages in crime while

Steve continually helps increase his father's fortune. He is responsible, mature and patient and as a result he builds a strong, close knit family. On the other hand, Jeff is impatient, immature, and irresponsible. This drives him to seek material wealth before building and strengthening family ties. As a result, his family disintegrates and he is left on his own. Jeff's character demonstrates that geopolitical factors have little to do with creation of dystopia as much as the individual's character. Thus, Jeff is to blame for all that befalls him.

The narrator in *Beyond the Darkness* uses the *matatu* sector as a setting to narrate some of the challenges facing the *matatu* crew in modern Kenya. He presents the *matatu* sector as chaotic and typically flooded by aggressive, violent and opportunistic individuals. Mbugua wa Mungai in "Kaa Masaa, Grapple with Spiders," however, calls for the society's attention to this group of people arguing that, "matatu culture can then be seen as a space from which the subaltern category dabbling at subversion talks back at the larger society" (30). The bias and contempt with which the larger society holds the *matatu* crew makes them fit in the subaltern category. As a consequence, the *matatu* crew embraces a culture that gives them a leeway to assert and to carve a space for themselves in the society. *Beyond the Darkness* reveals that the state and the public lack control over the sector through portrayal of violent characters that are mostly under the influence of alcohol. This is the case with Jeff and his gang. The gang attacks Nduati, a maize roaster and Jeff's rival in love, until he dies; nevertheless, they do not show remorse over the action. Similarly, in a different occasion, a *matatu* driver almost causes an accident when he starts the car before Gloria's mother has alighted. Rather than apologize, the driver

ignores her and drives off as if he had not seen nor heard Gloria's complaints. The passengers on the other hand appear used to such rough treatment that they merely laugh. Mungai in *Nairobi's Matatu Men: Potrait of a Subculture* interprets *matatu* men's violent and reckless behavior as caused by other underlying factors such as emasculation of the urban male. For Mungai:

Some of the *matatu* man's anxiety about his marginal position tends to bring to the fore his darker side as he attempts to get even with a society that he perceives to be constantly seeking to shunt him into the lowers echelons. (59)

Mbugua's analysis reveals that the *matatu* men feel that the public do not like them or their job. As a result, they hit back at the society by being rough and violent. This is way of *matatu* men asserting their manhood which has been stripped off by public contempt. The *matatu* drivers are presented as so impatient that they frequently speed or drive carelessly as they swerve from one lane to the other and blocking other motorists unapologetically. This conduct can be interpreted as being driven by an inner force to exhibit their imagined prowess and a mastery of their skill beyond that of the ordinary people. This way they convince themselves that they are different from what the ordinary people perceive them to be. This conduct also serves to create fear in the public that they dare not ask questions or react to the crew's misconduct.

To combat passengers with either legitimate or illegitimate complaints, the *matatu* drivers and touts carry all manner of crude weapons to defend themselves. Mungai observes that crews might become violently defensive in case of a threat as such their armory is characterized by weapons such as "rubber whips, metal bottles metal rods, knives, and

clubs and beer bottles (*Nairobi Matatu Men* 27). This trait is evident in the taxi driver who transports Jeff and Man Mess to Maina's house. The narrator says that the taxi driver "swiveled in his seat, one hand extended for the fare, the other one busy groping under the seat for a short stabbing Maasai dagger in case the customers became difficult" (40). The passage reveals that although the crew might be blamed for being violent and rough their work is also challenging. They work up to odd hours in the night and have to deal with all manner of people such as thieves, drunkards and even unruly customers. Worse still, the public holds them in contempt. The head teacher in Turu High School displays this contempt when she hears of Jacklin's involvement with a driver. She says, "can you imagine a sixteen- year- old flattering [sic] with *matatu* drivers and touts and God knows what else? Why, that girl is – is – deprived morally!" (33). The head teacher's comment exposes the contempt that the society holds toward the *matatu* crews. Granted that school is an agent of socialization, the same contempt is bound to be passed on to the society.

This chapter has looked at how Kibera narrates dystopia in contemporary Kenya. My interrogation of *Beyond the Darkness* reveals that dealing with dystopia depends more on how an individual reacts to the social, economic and political challenges than how the geopolitical circumstances define their social economic status. While it is obvious that the marginalized subjects need to make themselves heard, Kibera's novel demonstrates that subversive conducts only entangle the subaltern subjects into more marginalization.

The next chapter examines how the two novels, *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness*, foreground the notion of dystopia in modern Kenya through manipulation and use of language, narrative techniques and stylistic strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY STRATEGIES IN *BEYOND THE DARKNESS* AND *LEADING THE NIGHT*

Introduction

This chapter examines how the novels under study manipulate and use language, narrative techniques and other stylistic strategies to foreground the notion of dystopia and to project the social vision for modern Kenya that they fictionalize. Edward Quinn defines foregrounding as “the use of language in such a way that it calls attention to itself, setting it off from the ordinary language of a text” (175). The two novels under study depict a deliberate manipulation of language and other narrative strategies to foreground dystopia. This chapter reads the two novels *Beyond the Darkness* and *Leading the Night* alongside each other with the view to explore how the individual texts employ both unique and similar strategies to narrate dystopia in the fictionalized modern Kenyan context and to project a seemingly unified vision for that society.

Foregrounding through Plotting and Chapter Naming

“Plotting,” according to Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot*, refers to “that which makes the plot move forward and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and potent design that hold the promise of progress towards meaning” (xiii). The plot in *Leading the Night* is subdivided into several segments. Each segment appears as a chapter within the plot. However, the events cutting across the various chapters are linked together such that at the end one can classify the novel as one frame narrative with multiple embedded narratives and meta-narratives. The plot is

loosely packaged such that various issues and conflicts introduced within the narrative are never resolved or addressed any more in the narrative. For instance, in the part titled “By the Rivers of Pain” the narrator gives a fragmented narration with paragraphs that do not flow into each other because they address totally different issues. More so, the issues mentioned are not developed to create a meaningful interpretation. The following paragraphs illustrate this clearly:

The prayer meeting was stopped by Petrol bombs made in Russia. People died. A little boy died. A new constitution was coming. The 1998 August bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi killed 257 in Kenya (12 Americans) and injured 4 836 Kenyans was hardly commemorated because a new Kenyan constitution was on the way [sic] A super coordinated attack, the blast in Dar es Salaam went off minutes after Nairobi, killing 11 and injuring 86 Tanzanians. Kenyan victims who lost limbs, sight and hearing were tossed between Al-Qaida and America for compensation. America spent money faster in retaliation hitting Sudan and Afghanistan.

In the homes as some drunk thin milky tea before going to sleep that evening, cups dropped. ‘Brrruu.pu.pu.pu puuuuppppp!’ The sound of bullets rang. It was a policeman’s wife. He had seen her looking at his colleague who was undressing in the next room “Puuup! Pup!Pup!Puuuuup!’ rang bullets in the smart suburbs.

A rich woman shoots the judge she married two years ago. She had just found out that at 45, he had an 18 year-old sweetheart who had a new baby last week. “These were not the days of polygamy!” She shouted before opening fire.

People visiting from Europe and travelling by road were appalled by the many signs of church G, church B, church C and even church X.... (62)

The four paragraphs cited above address totally different ideas that do not flow into each other. For instance, the first paragraph questions the issue of the vexed question of terrorism and the debate on making of a new constitution. None of these issues are developed further. Instead the subsequent paragraphs highlight the issue of female and male subjectivity respectively in two different settings. The last paragraph addresses the proliferation of churches in the streets of Nairobi. Similarly, the issue is not developed further. The quick pace of unexpected and tragic events following each other helps build a dystopic atmosphere. The series of misfortunes, one after the other, are symbolic of fragmentation and disorder in the society. The title of the chapter, "Rivers of Pain" (59) thus foregrounds the different forms of pain experienced by the people as mentioned in the chapter and it gives a snippet view of what happens in the extra textual world from which the novel is set– Kenya.

The title "Fleas and Jiggers" (142) signals poverty and ill health that is suffered by the urban subjects. Both parasites implied by the title are prevalent in dirty and congested places. As the narrator explains, both parasites acquire their notoriety from the way they torture individuals both physically and mentally. As evident in the narrative, Wairi could not concentrate or settle because of the itch she experiences as a result of the parasitic attacks. The narrator uses this parallelism to compare Deni's disturbing thoughts to the irritating discomfort inflicted by the fleas and the jiggers. The narrator observes that "the sad thoughts pushed each in her mind like jiggers" (143). Wairi's thoughts display her

inner turmoil at the thought that she could be infected with the HIV/Aids virus given that her customers mostly reject using condoms. The title also foregrounds the fear that Wairi has towards her husband, Yaadi. Like a flea or a jigger, Yaadi physically and psychologically tortures Wairi. He cuts her using a blade and emphasizes to her that she does not have the power to protect herself from him because she is a woman. Like her female counterparts in the novel, her voice is muted.

At times the reader feels that the world woven and presented in the text through manipulation of the plot is more chaotic than the real world from which the narrative is set. The characters are so pitted in a hostile world and they move from one tragedy to another without even a momentary break. More so, the segmented structure suggests the narrative's awareness that corruption in Kenya cannot be explained or grasped by a single/univocal narrative. Unmasking it, as the various subheadings suggest, involves coming to terms with small acts some of which seem commonplace and innocuous, but which have a significant place in the grand corruption that the novelist struggles to expose imaginatively. It is through this manipulation of the plot structure that the narrative foregrounds the notion of dystopia.

Beyond the Darkness presents a plot that is linearly and tightly packaged. The fictitious world in the narrative appears natural such that the reader easily identifies with it as a representation of what happens in the everyday world. To foreground dystopia, the narrative is set apart by the presence of a prologue, "In the Beginning" and an epilogue which appears as a continuation of the prologue. In the prologue the narrator says:

Slowly and obtrusively, Nairobi River snaked its way through the Industrial Area, picking effluence and raw sewage from factory backyards. Finally, it emerged east of the city, greenish, oily sludge broiling and foaming over trapped debris. It wove its way past steep banks where chang'aa brewers buried their distillation drums, then beyond to rocky wasteland. Then banks suddenly leveled out and a proliferation of shanties now flanked its both sides, like an eruption around a diseased vein.

It moved on, a silent unobtrusive force, down the plains of Tsavo, to go and spend its poisonous cargo in the Indian Ocean, five hundred miles to the south. (1)

The epilogue begins mid sentence and refers back to the same issues raised in the prologue thereby making it appear as a continuation of the prologue. The narrator says:

... it moved on relentlessly down the wild Tsavo plains, a silent, unobtrusive force, bringing respite along its gently-winding banks. Finally, with chaotic dissonance,

it embraced the surging ocean waves. As one finally; salt and poison as one ...

High above, framed against the darkening skies, a sea gull called to its own – the last shrieking appeal before the first rain drops fell hesitantly but heavily, heralding a storm. Then it broke, shrouding both island and sea in one grey nondescript sheet.... (360)

Both the prologue and epilogue foreground dystopia by creating a decayed and disorderly world from which there appears to be no recourse. Even without the whole body of the

narrative, these segments blend together to encompass a complete chaotic world. Yet each either precedes or follows the body from which they derive their force and meaning.

The embedded narratives of Jeff and Jacklin after separation are narrated parallel to the frame narrative so that all come to a close almost at the same time. In addition, the presentation of embedded narratives alongside the frame narrative allows the narrator to develop the characters fully since each embedded narrative deals with a particular character. The reader can therefore draw contrast on how the dialectics of good/evil, utopia/dystopia, light/ darkness are manifested in the society. The embedded narratives are narrated parallel to the frame narrative and come to a close almost at the same time hence projecting a closed moralistic ending.

Foregrounding through Characterization

The narratives in *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness* reflect a conscious and unconscious characterization to foreground the hostile and harsh realities that the characters encounter in their day to day lives. The narrator in *Leading the Night* rarely engages the characters in the real actions or conversations; rather, the narrator mostly reports the events from Rika's point of view which is based from the fragmented narratives she collects during her journalistic investigations. The traits of the individual characters are mostly seen from the point of view of either the central focalizer or the victims whom she interviews or interacts with. The reader only gets to know the characters as Rika presents them or by the way they interact with the forces of marginalization that the characters allege to be repressing them. This strategy helps the

narrator to give the gendered representation of urban setting within the context of the narratives.

The narrative in *Leading the Night* depicts women as victims of a male dominated society. They are sexually exploited, physically abused and emotionally tortured by men. Nonetheless, the women are depicted as strong, brave and resilient and the reader gets the impression that most women do not view themselves as victims since they are able to reclaim themselves from repression to assert their individuality. An example is Deni who, although raped and sexually abused when so young, transcends her naïve self that had earlier made her feel unwanted and rejected. She uses prostitution as an opportunity for her to hit back at any man who dares to exploit her. This creates a sense that she is in charge of the game which life has thrown her into but which must be played according to her own customized rules. She says, “Cut like thissss!” (39) being her mantra. The stress in the word ‘this’ and the finality in her voice indicates the anger and the bitterness that drives her to revenge. Her remark is also suggestive that the initial abuse meted out on her psychologically transforms her from a passive position to an active agent. Similarly, Wairi who is initially presented as an unfortunate woman trapped by the forces of repression eventually manages to outwit her exploitative husband to pave her way to freedom.

A reading through the narrative further reveals that although prostitution helps women assert themselves, it paradoxically creates despair and disillusionment in the exploited women. For instance, Wairi has to deal with the fear of contracting HIV/Aids, unwanted pregnancies and the constant possibility of being physically abused by her male partners.

The narrator's comments portray women as more focused, intelligent and responsible than their male counterparts who are conniving, irresponsible and at times cowardly. Rika poses rhetorical questions that seek to disclaim the popularized intelligence and responsibility of men in running the society's affairs:

Why should it be women speaking about all these problems and that you see so clearly yourself and men almost always sitting in highest offices? Why should women deal with all the problems listed before? Many men are sell outs to the government of the day which are men's domain anywhere [sic]. (27)

These questions indict men as irresponsible and dormant especially in the running of the society's affairs. On the contrary, women are presented as brave and passionate about transforming the society. The narrator argues that the power of women is "undebatable" (26) even by the mere looking at Rika's own life. This creates the notion that it is a universally acclaimed truth that women are powerful enough to confront all social problems unlike their male counterparts. This presentation is static and appears more as a caricature. Nonetheless, a closer reading reveals that such behavioral tendencies from men can mostly be attributed to the socialization that makes men believe that they are superior to women. Therefore most men forcefully attempt to make their presence and power felt. An example is Yaadi, Wairi's husband, who beats her even when she has done no wrong. The narrative depicts such men as victims of the social economic conditions that emasculate them by socializing them with empty masculinist views that have little space in real life. Yet it is worth observing that even though Ikonya's novel is multi-focused, it does not create a balance in its representation of men and women.

Women are favoured and depicted as victims of men while men are presented as perpetrators of women's victimization. This lopsided approach in characterization is what foregrounds the dystopia in the novel.

Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* creates a seemingly satisfactory and natural representation and balance between men and women in the narrative. Plausibly, this can be attributed to the fact that characters are presented in their natural setting as they engage and interact with one another. The narrative portrays round characters that are fully developed in the course of the narrative. For example, the narrator presents Jeff, a criminal, as possessing both a ruthless and humane face. Jeff can kill and rob with violence and equally love and provide for his family. Although the male characters in *Beyond the Darkness* are slightly stronger than the female characters in the text, the narrative does not overtly blame anyone or any group for the ran-down lives of the characters as is the case with Ikonya's *Leading the Night*. Rather, Kibera's novel presents characters in their real life engagement and leaves the readers to decide what contributes to the characters' present conditions.

The two novels construct model characters who constructively confront the forces of repression to effect change. For example, *Leading the Night* uses Rika, the focalizer, as an agent through whom change is possible. She castigates the forces of repression by giving an investigative expose of their secret lives. Rika is modeled as a brave, determined and focused woman ready to risk her life for the sake of her country. For this reason, she wins a fictive 'Mandela Literary Award'. The title of the award denotes the great significance played by Nelson Mandela, the first president of South Africa who

fought tirelessly against the apartheid rule. He is considered an icon for Africa because after the black South Africans gained freedom, Mandela called for reconciliation between the White and Black South Africans. The fictional award given to Rika therefore symbolizes the great struggle and contribution that Rika plays in the fight for justice for the marginalized subjects. Rika's success signals hope that the forces of repression have been overcome.

Beyond the Darkness constructs Gloria as a strong, intelligent and resilient woman who succeeds against many odds. Her success is thus symbolic of the hope that the slum dwellers of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley can strive and rise above the social economic and political forces that marginalize them.

Foregrounding through Repetition

From the onset of the two novels, the narratives paint a picture that all is wrong and they maintain nearly the same impression up to the end of the novels. This mood is achieved through repetition of words and phrases, through telling and retelling of events in the narratives, and through the presence of embedded narratives that reinforce the frame narrative. These elements help create a cyclic turn of events. In *Leading the Night* for example, the plot moves back and forth to show how various women are subjected to similar and diverse harsh conditions which force them to resort to prostitution to eke out a living. The narrative repeatedly presents this mood through either the narrator who narrates the ordeals that such women go through. At times the narrator cedes the power of narration to characters themselves and they narrate their ordeals or those of others like them. A good example is the case of the stories of Wairi, Deni, Mwangaza and Mercy

who are all prostitutes within the city. While Deni engages in prostitution after an alleged rape by her father and a subsequent impregnation by her teacher at the age of ten, Wairi resorts to prostitution due to her husband's negligence of her conjugal rights and the violence that the husband metes out on her. Although the two women are placed in different locations and contexts, they receive similar subjugation. This begs the question of whether it is appropriate to allege that Deni receives such mistreatment because she voluntarily offers herself to men yet Wairi, who is married, still receives similar mistreatment.

At close reading, the women's actions in *Leading the Night*, however, can be interpreted as attempts by various women to attain agency of their own. This is possible through the use of their bodies as tools of resistance against violence and exploitation by men. The female prostitute ceases being a victim and becomes an agent who can voice her discontentment by hitting back at the very society with prostitution which it loathes. Thus, through telling and retelling of similar narratives, the novel foregrounds the theme of female subjectivity.

The strained relationship between the poor citizenry and the state exposes prevalence of unresolved past conflicts. The narrative repeatedly creates the notion that the state neglects the urban poor by depicting failed or absence of structures that can protect the poor against exploitation or help them out of their economic hardships. An example is the absence of rules and regulations to enable the poor access justice. Rajua, a former drug addict, draws our attention to these conflicts when he tells Rika that "the poor have no justice" (51). Injustice recurs throughout the novel. Rika sums up this notion with the

statement that “Justice depended on how much one had” (52). This implies that there is no justice and that the ordinary citizenry are disillusioned.

Beyond the Darkness presents repetitive and cyclic presentation of disillusionment among the characters in the narrative. The family occupies a central position in replication of disillusionment. The narrative juxtaposes Gloria and Jacklin’s families to those of their parents thereby foregrounding the repetition of similar hardships. For example, Jacklin’s parents are poor even before they marry. Their marriage, however, does not change their economic conditions or that of their only daughter Jacklin. She is so poor that she cannot meet her children’s basic needs. In fact, Jacklin’s children Tony and Erica are trapped in such despair that they are unable to grapple with their parents’ fall. Just like Jacklin, Erica flirts with a tout and plans secretly to forego school to get married to him, while Tony takes to drug abuse and theft like his father. Eventually, he disappears without trace. Such replication of misfortunes within the family line foregrounds the inability of slum dwellers to change their social and economic situation.

The narrator compounds this feeling of disillusionment by repeatedly referring to them as “a poor, honest-to-God lot eking out basic subsistence” (3). The atmosphere of disillusionment created helps to foreground their helplessness and to reveal the vicious cycle of poverty that delineates the poor residents’ lives. Gloria’s family however stands out against many odds to attain hope. She manages to carve a niche for herself unlike all the other slum dwellers by breaking the cycle of poverty that affects the family.

Motif of Night/Darkness vs. Day/Light

Darkness features in the popular imagination of the narratives as the opposite of light. Naturally one cannot think of darkness without the idea of the night. The imagery of the night and darkness thus joins the two novels. Darkness and night in the narratives symbolize the forces of evil and oppressive forces that marginalize the poor disadvantaged subjects as discussed in chapters two and three. Such forces include female and male subjection, state oppression, underworld criminal gangsterism, drunkenness, poverty and prostitution. The forces are unlovable, unacceptable, deceptive and subversive. More so, these forces limit the knowledge of the characters so that at times they engage in socially unsanctionable behaviour only to trap themselves further. Such is the case with characters like Deni, Wairi and Rajua who engage in prostitution in *Leading the Night*. Even if the characters open a window for such conducts with a view of accessing freedom, they end up being more enslaved.

The state's oppressive tendencies trigger the formation of criminal gangs that challenge the status quo. The state on the other hand fights back by violently silencing such gangs and their attempts to challenge state power. This is evident in the way the two narratives depict government officers' use of excessive force to silence the people. In *Beyond the Darkness* the police officers attack the residents of the valley indiscriminately killing the innocent and the criminals alike. The narrator says:

The commotion was instant, and took the crowd by shock. Suddenly, the corner where the hecklers were concentrated, turned into a boiling, wailing mass of bodies, everyone trying to get away from the club-wielding administration

policemen. The heavy clubs swung indiscriminately, pummeling flesh and bones. Then in the midst of flailing arms and screaming, came an agonized cry of a woman, her mournful wailing slicing through the still air like a knife and remaining suspended above all other cries. In the dead silence that followed, she staggered out of the churning dust cradling her baby, its head smashed by a blow from the heavy clubs. (91)

The police officers, as evident in the passage, stand out as the agents whom the politicians use to oppress the people. The area chief commands his officers to attack the people in order to make his power felt.

In *Leading the Night* the police harass Rei with false accusations that he is trafficking drugs and girls. The police do not introduce themselves and they do not explain why they are arresting him. The narrator observes that:

The taxi came to an abrupt halt and Rei could not tell how he got into the boot of the car but he was there breathing hard and curled like his own luggage. He could feel his laptop against his heart. When the boot was finally snapped open after fifteen minutes long and rough ride, he was in agony. There were no girls in the car, only a very scared driver whose face he did not even have a chance to see. He was forced out and straight into handcuffs. He was dizzy, shocked and very perplexed. (236)

The excerpt depicts the police officers as ruthless and unreasonable. They handle Rei's case with no expertise or dignity. At the end Rei is released with an excuse that it was by

the order from the PCIO (Provincial Criminal Investigating Officer) that he was arrested and by his order he is released. The police officer follows his boss' command without conducting an investigation to verify the claims.

In a different incident the narrator explains the great fear exhibited by Rajua once he sees the police officers. The narrator reports on Rajua "they kill easy," he kept on saying. They shoot-to-kill!" The man was paranoid. He had to have a 'quik-quik' drink to continue functioning" (50). Rajua's fear is instilled by the constant harassment he received from the police when he was a prostitute at the coast. He understands that it is possible for one to be arrested or killed by the law enforcers for a trivial or no crime. Thus, as evident in the two novels, the speaking-silencing binary and the voicing-devoicing dialectic is thus the central organizing motif in so far as characters are always looking for ways of making themselves audible. Paradoxically, some of the characters' chosen mode of expression leads to further disarticulation. Darkness and night in the two narratives symbolize dystopia while light/day symbolize utopia.

The titles of the two novels are symbolic. *Beyond the Darkness* foregrounds the possibility of overcoming the forces of darkness as represented by Gloria who successfully wrestles with the forces of darkness and overcomes. *Leading the Night* on the other hand reflects the various attempts by the characters to confront the forces of darkness most of which are unacceptable. As a result, most of the characters do not succeed. However, Rika succeeds against all odds; her attempts are fruitful because she confronts the forces of darkness using legitimate methods. Her efforts are symbolic of what the society ought to strive to achieve in order to break disillusionment and despair

that makes their world disorderly and unlivable. The choice of such titles of the novels project a social vision reflected in the texts that despite the challenges the marginalized subjects go through, there is hope that they can use alternative modes of action to initiate change.

Code-switching and Code-mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing involves the use of bilingual or multilingual speech that integrates the words or sound patterns of the other in mid sentence. The two stylistic devices are a common feature in the works of African authors. Michael Halliday defines code-switching as “code-shift actualized as a process within the individual: the speaker moves from one code to another and back, more or less rapidly, in course of a single sentence” (65). Eyamba Bokamba on the other hand defines code-mixing as “the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes) phrases and clauses from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems within the same sentence and speech event” (278). Rinkanya in “Code-Switching in the Contemporary Kenyan Novel after 2000” contends with Paul Bandia’s view that code-switching and code-mixing “highlights certain pragmatic functions such as *foregrounding, identity, focusing, distancing and neutralization*” (85). The two novels employ code-switching and code-mixing to foreground dystopia.

In *Leading the Night*, the narrator mimics the police officers’ words to foreground their incompetence, “*Weee! Hio ni kali sio ile ya hapa tuna shika shika!* [It means that Rei’s case was too hot to be manipulated as they regularly do for the locals.”] (240 *my translation*). The remark is made in Kiswahili, the national and official language in

Kenya, to exclude Rei from the communication. Although they have successfully arrested Rei on false claims, it appears hard to retain him in the cell because he has capable lawyers to stand by him. Rika and Rei suspect that Rei is being arrested because of investigating the genesis and the operations of the Saba Saba Defence Force, a mili-gang that most officers were secretly involved in.

The narrator alludes to the popular phrase among Kenyans that “*hakuna matata*” (no worries) (95). Rei observes that this is the spirit of Kenyans and Kenya. Ironically, Kenya as depicted in the narrative is experiencing serious challenges. The phrase is set apart to foreground the discrepancy in the statement and to satirize such populist statements that conceal the real challenges that Kenyans are going through. The phrase is borrowed from Them Mushroom’s song “Jambo Bwana” (1980) which presents Kenya as a peaceful and beautiful country. The fact that Rei overhears these words while landing at Jomo Kenyatta Airport underscores the discrepancy that Rei would encounter once he begins interacting with the locals.

Young urbanely characters use sheng to converse among themselves. Sheng varies depending on the place and social group an individual is involved. The street vendors, the *matatu* crew, commercial sex workers and ordinary citizens use sheng distinctively to capture their world and sensibilities. For instance, in *Leading the Night*, “*Without Kapote*” (28), means without a condom. Mwangaza uses these words to explain some of the challenges that commercial sex workers go through. The failure of their customers to use condom exposes them to unwanted pregnancies and risks of contracting diseases such as HIV/Aids. Further, use of such language sets her apart from the rest of the people as it

identifies her with other commercial sex workers who understand her language. Rinkanya in “Sheng Literature in Kenya: Social-linguistic Borders and Spaces in Popular Poetry” argues that, “socially, sheng has traditionally been the language of urban youth – and more over youth belonging to the lower poorly educated groups of Kenyan society” (297). Most commercial sex workers represented in the narrative belong to this category of urban poor because they possess little or no education. They resort to sheng to enhance communication among the various ethnic categories within the group.

Beyond the Darkness shows prevalence use of “sheng” in the *matatu* sector. The crew is largely made up of young people. The use of sheng helps to localize the text within the urban setting. The narrative constantly code-switches to sheng to capture the challenges encountered by the *matatu* crew. This is evident in Man Mess’ words:

that was *poa* man, real *poa*, the way you cut off those *mikebes!*’...then as the last frustrated passenger was jumping out, he walked back yelling “*Ura!*” and giving the side of the vehicle a resounding bang with an open palm to render it some urgency. (16)

Man Mess praises Jeff for his prowess in overtaking other vehicles on the road ignoring the risks involved. The resounding bang followed by ‘*ura*’ reflects the impatience and urgency that is a common among the *matatu* crew. *Ura!* is a Kikuyu word which means ‘run away’, thus, reflecting the urgency and speed that the *matatu* is supposed to move at. Man Mess’ behavioral conduct is a microcosm of what happens in the *matatu* industry. The *matatu* crews are extremely aggressive, violent and impatient. This suggests an

underlying problem. Mungai argues that, “crews resort to violence as a means of affirming their manhood” (*Nairobi Matatu Men* 27). Mungai’s argument suggests that the matatu crew feel rejected by the mainstream society and they consequently resort to different modes of action and language to make their presence felt. Use of sheng helps the matatu crew exclude the mainstream society whom they feel reject them on the basis of their job description.

Similarly, the narrator in *Leading the Night* uses Gikuyu words such as “*Mwene Nyaga*” (108) (reference to Gikuyu god). Wairi reports that Yaadi invokes these words every time during the ritual. The words set him apart as a member of the gang; more so, the words reflect the mystery that surrounds the gang such that a non-member may fail to get the implication. A translation of the same words may also fail to give a semantically equivalent word.

In *Beyond the Darkness*, the chief refers to the gathered crowd as “*wananchi*” and asks them for their opinion. He asks:

“Did you hear that Wananchi? America in the United States!” ...And is your daughter here with you Mrs. Munyua? People would like see her in the flesh – or what do you say Wananchi? ... “But this cannot be peace where there are some among us hell-bent on visiting chaos and mayhem on the rest of innocent Wananchi! (92-93)

The repetitive reference of the gathered crowd as *wananchi* (citizens) is meant to persuade the audience to embrace the chief’s point of view and to create an impression that he cares. “*Mwananchi*,” in Kiswahili means ‘son of the soil or custodian of the land’

ironically, the citizens who are being referred to as “*wananchi*” by the chief own nothing and suffer from massive neglect by the state. Thus by the use of the word, the narrative foregrounds the irony denoted by the semantic reference of the word and the people being referred to thus foregrounding the marginalization of the residents.

Beyond the Darkness code-switches and code-mixes to trace the geographical shift in the setting of the narrative. For instance, when Jeff moves to Tanzania, the narrative employs frequent reference of Kiswahili words such as “*ndugu*” (brother) (235) and “*shukran*” (244) a courteous word meaning “thank you” in Kiswahili. These references are common in Tanzania and the East African coastal regions. Code-mixing and code-switching not only identifies the setting, but it also enriches the text by exposing the language and sensibilities of the people in the narrative.

Use of Allusion

Allusion refers to reference within a literary text to some place, person, or event outside the text which the reader is assumed to know. Peter Childs and Rodger Fowler observe that allusion helps the writer establish a tone, infer an association, contrast two objects or people thus helping the reader to access more experience outside the story world that would enhance a better interpretation of the story.

Leading the Night extensively uses literary allusion to foreground disillusionment. To criticize the sycophant journalists, Rika argues that the journalist ignored the knowledge they had acquired from important books such as *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire and the play *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo. The two texts discuss the oppression the colonized subject received from

their colonizers and how the colonizers took advantage of their privileged status in the colony to exploit their subjects using all available apparatus including education. Rika is dismayed that such journalists dare betray their people yet they have the knowledge of what it took for their country to gain freedom from the colonizers. To castigate such individualistic tendencies among the leaders, to curb corruption, and to cultivate accountability and responsible leadership that the leaders should have in Kenya, the narrator, through Rei informs the reader of the proposal suggested after Rika's book wins the fictive Mandela Literary Award, that would see Kenyans elect responsible leaders. The narrator says:

Long Road to Freedom, has been voted compulsory reading for all people in leadership in Kenya, youth, old men and women people in parliament...have to learn...lines from a play entitle *Betrayal in the City* by Francis Imbuga, and be tested on it, before going lead us! (250)

This is a poignant suggestion to the reader of the novel that the narrative should be taken with the political weight that sharply points Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* as a record of lived experienced within an unjust political system. Hence by this single call the narrative is inviting Kenyan leaders to emulate him. By juxtaposing a reading of Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, alongside the fictional play *Betrayal in the City* by Francis Imbuga, is suggestive to the reader to see the new completed story as tragedy of injustice and a satire on the systems of disarticulation that the reader has encountered within the narrative now ended. Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* focuses on Nelson Mandela's struggle against apartheid. Mandela was the first Black South

African president to be democratically elected after the end of apartheid. He is an icon because even after twenty seven years of imprisonment, he did not seek revenge against his former jailers. Rather, he called for reconciliation between the Black and the White South Africans. He says, “liberation movement was not a battle against any one group or color, but it was a fight against a system of repression” (806).

Betrayal in the City focuses on the challenges being faced by post independence African states. It satirizes poor leadership that has plagued most of these states. Imbuga’s play also mocks the state apparatus used by dictatorial leaders to acquire and maintain power. By alluding to the two texts, the narrator calls for the readers’ attention on the challenges facing the Kenyan state. It is also a wake-up call to the Kenyans to identify with great personalities who sacrifice their lives for their societies.

The characters in the story are to be understood as actors in a theatre that has circumscribed their lives. The intersection between real life and fiction is thus highlighted to the reader since this narrative is both a product of society and a commentary on that society of which it is a product. The narrative also alludes to other texts such as *Out of Africa* (15) by Karen Blixen to invite the reader to question the discourse in which Kenya is framed. *Out of Africa* presents a Eurocentric image of African cultures as primitive and inferior to those of the whites’. Rei rejects such Eurocentric views and proposes Afro-centric approach to issues relating to interpretation of African cultures. In addition, Rei’s proposal calls for the reader’s awareness of how Kenya and Africa have been negatively represented in Eurocentric texts. This allusion therefore re-visits the issue of misrepresentation of Africa by the colonizers thus foregrounding how political

mismanagement of affairs in modern Kenya compounds the problem which has not yet recovered from the misconceived images.

The narrator also alludes to Them Mushroom's popular song "*Jambo Bwana, Hakuna Matata*" (170) which literally mean that in Kenya there are no worries:

Swahili	English translation
Jambo-jambo bwana	Hey - Hey man (literally, 'sir')
Habari gani	How are you
Mzuri sana	Very fine
Wageni mwakaribishwa	Visitors are welcome
Kenya yetu	Our (country) Kenya
Hakuna matata	(there are) no worries
Kenya nchi nzuri	Kenya is a nice country
Nchi ya maajabu	A beautiful country
Nchi yenye amani	A peaceful country
Kenya yetu	Our country
Kenya wote	All Kenyans. (Them Mushroom, 1999)

The song emphasizes the prevailing peace in the country and takes pride in its people, language, culture, peace and its citizenry. However, this is not the case as the narrative demonstrates Kenyans are faced with various problems such as corruption, insecurity, poverty, injustice and poor leadership.

Beyond the Darkness alludes to the history of the Portuguese trading at the East African coast in the 16th and 17th Century. At the visit to Mombasa, Gloria visits many places one of them being the *Fort Jesus*. The writings on the wall tell much of the tug of war between the Portuguese soldiers, and the Oman Sultans. The *Fort Jesus*, one of the tourist attraction sites in Mombasa, stands out as a historical monument that denotes the moments that helped shape the history of the scenic coast. The setting of the narrative alludes to real geographical places such as “Karen” (151), “Huruma” (149) and “Jamhuri” (229) which are residential estates in Nairobi. The setting identifies the geopolitical connotations attached to these places. Karen is believed to be an area inhabited by the rich, Jamhuri by the middle class and Huruma by the low class. Thus, Jacklin’s shift to Karen denotes upward social mobility while a shift to Jamhuri and finally to Satellite indicates her fallen economic status. These shifts affect both Jacklin and the children. More so, it explains why the children find it hard to accept their fallen status.

Diction

The two narratives deliberately use words to foreground the challenges that ordinary citizens go through. For example, in *Leading the Night*, the narrator refers to the strong rich person, who has control over the journalist as the “Big man” (9) while the journalist is referred as “a good boy” (10). By juxtaposing these two references, the narrator exposes the big rift between the rich and powerful and the poor and powerless. The big man demeans the journalists by instilling fear in them so that they lack the freedom to relay news to the people. In fact, some agree to his manipulation and serve his vested

interests. This reference thus connotes corruption, misuse of power and lack of freedom of expression.

The reference on “two dancing snakes (1) at the beginning of Ikonya’s novel connote socially and politically perpetrated evils. The two dancing snakes refer to the underworld gang and the gang of the rich and powerful. Irrespective of the group, they both are poisonous and dangerous and equally destructive to the economy of Kenya. Rika also gives the hotels names that are connotative, for instance; she refers to one of the hotels as “Berg-a-Gold Hotel” (17). Rika uses this anagram to insinuate Goldenberg. Goldenberg refers to a grand corruption scandal which hit the country in early 1990’s. William Karanja in an article “Kenya: Corruption Scandal” reports that the scandal involved some high government officials who organized for a subsidize export of gold to the Golden Berg international company resulting to a massive loss of the country’s revenue. By alluding to this scandal in the narrative, the narrator highlights some of the challenges that the Kenyan nation has faced in the recent years and has not yet healed.

Beyond the Darkness uses certain words that are connotatively loaded. For instance, the narrator points out that there were few people with a permanent place of living. The narrator says that only few would boast of “a solid mud wall” (6) house. This statement reveals the poverty affecting the residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley; they are so poor that they cannot even afford a purely mud walled house as soil is equally scarce. Jeff describes the relationship between the residents of the slum at Maina’s place of residence as controlled by some sort of “brotherhood” (42). This connotes the solidarity that exists among the low class such that they can cover for one another as ‘brothers’. In addition,

the narrator describes the rural emigrants' movement to the city as 'flocked' (2). The description creates the impression that it is an unorganized crowd that is prone to bring strain in the available social amenities and possibly force residents to rise against one another. Further, the statement foregrounds the disillusionment that defines the residents' because neither the city nor the rural favours them.

The language of the characters also reveals their level of education. Reading *Leading the Night*, the reader gets the impression that the inscribed reader/narratee of the narrative belongs to the elite class precisely because the choice of words and ideologies referred to in the text calls for an educated audience. Also, the reader can linguistically categorize the characters in different classes depending on the language they use. For example, Rika uses phrases that are ideologically derived such as "feminism" (25) "FGM" (25), "West" (7) and reference to economic growth of the country (160). Therefore Rika belongs to the elite class. Other characters like Wairi have little knowledge on the geography of the world and show massive mother tongue interference. Wairi, for instance, perceives 'abroad' as an umbrella term for all English speaking countries. The reader can thus identify her as a semi-literate person from a lower social rung even without being informed about the challenges she is going through. Likewise, Jacklin's mother in *Beyond the Darkness* cannot tell what is TOEFL (Test in English as a Foreign Language) is. She asks Gloria, "What is this thing you keep calling Tobo" (106). The statement reveals that she has little or no education. The two novels deliberately use specific diction to foreground the social stratification through language and to point out the challenges that comes with this social economic order.

Dialogue

While most of the actions in the narrative unfold through narration, sometimes the narrator cedes the power of the narration to the characters to re-enact the situations as they happen. Dialogue allows the reader to interact with the characters as they narrate and share their experiences to one another. Such dialogues highlight and expound issues as perceived by the characters themselves. For instance, in *Leading the Night*, the dialogue between Rika and Rei in The Thorn Tree Hotel at The Stanley reveal the challenges faced by the journalists in Kenya. The journalists are threatened, intimidated, censored and manipulated by the state, the rich and the powerful. The journalists who are fearful toe the line and betray the people while those courageous like Rika and Rei risk their lives for the sake of truth. This is confirmed by Rei's remark to Rika that: "our other name as you well know is "risk" (134). This remark indicates Rei's readiness to unearth the truth whatever cost. The journalists who serve the people like Rei and Rika are forced therefore by circumstances to work under cover lest they are arrested and their plans killed. Rika informs Rei that they should meet in a more private place because The Thorn Tree hotel was "an eaves dropper's paradise" (134). The statement implies that the two have a strong conviction that they are being followed and therefore they have to take great caution.

The dialogue between Rei and Fundi on the Mungiki sect reveals the people's fear towards the sect. The sect is not only mysterious but it also instills fear among the people such that they fear talking about the sect:

"What ram?"

"The holy ram!"

“Oh, you mean the Lamb of God?”

“Yes!”

“I know police kill them, but them, whom do they kill?”

“Betrayers.”

“But how do the police know them?”

“They do not...no one does. Those shot dead were not their members.”

“Oho....You must not tell anyone what I am doing!” (204)

Rei’s plea to Fundi not to tell on him reflects the fear that the people have towards the sect. The dialogue also reveals the mysterious power that the gang has such that not even the state can handle them. As such, the people are unprotected and live with the constant threats and exploitation from the sect.

The dialogue at the end between Rika and Rei signals change and hope. It is suggestive that Rika’s efforts and sacrifice are rewarded:

Do I start with congratulations or with thank you or both? Asked Rei. “And what a strange coincidence that the Mandela Literary Award ceremony is in Geneva followed by a trip to Soweto in Johannesburg with Winnie and Graca!” He continued.

What I am reading here is more impressive. Long Road to Freedom has been chosen a compulsory reading for all people in leadership in Kenya.... (250)

In *Beyond the Darkness* dialogues also play a significant role. For instance, the dialogue between Gloria and the stranger who buys the car from her reveals the fraud and the rottenness in the society:

“I deal with cars ma’am. I can tell straight away you are better off selling.”

“How...” she stammered, staring at the beefy, greasy face, fearful of the answer,

“...how much?”

“...I ‘m afraid not more than sixty thousands.”

“*Sixty!* Then make it sixty- five – please.” It was a plea.

“...Please –!”

“Okay sixty-two, five hundred maximum,” he agreed reluctantly, “like I said I was only passing by so I guess you are lucky.” (304-305)

The man takes advantage of Gloria’s dilemma and advises her to sell the car to him. Gloria is so desperate that she does not think of an alternative measure. She sells her only remaining property at a throw away price and decides to vacate the residence to Satellite, a lower income generating zone.

The dialogue between Jacklin’s mother, her daughter and Gloria points to a happy family. Having endured so many challenges, Gloria uplifts the family’s economic status. The three can now look back at Rukungu Valley with awe with the knowledge that they have made it out of the dreadful valley:

“Slow down mum. Remember your lumbago,” Jacklin pleaded anxiously.

“My lumbago?” demanded the old one, laboring on ahead at demanding pace...

“To say the truth girls,” she whispered conspiratorially, “I couldn’t wait to get away from that place. I kept worrying the owner might come and find us staring at his home!”(370)

The fact that they fear that the owner might see them insinuates that the problem of the land and housing still exists and that they are happy to have made it out of the valley.

Naming

Leading the Night names characters and places symbolically. Most of the names given foreground the challenges that the characters go through. For instance, “Deni” a name of a commercial sex worker who is raped at the age of ten is a Kiswahili word which means ‘debt’. The society is highly indebted to Deni because it violates and neglects her rights. Consequently, she is always looking for ways to avenge her pain of betrayal. The narrator says that she killed men with broken glasses if they played with her. “Mercy” (35) is a name for the other commercial sex worker. Just like her name, she deserves sympathy. She is so bitter at the police officers who indiscriminately harass them and leave out their male partners. She says: “we shall one day beat these hyenas in their own game. Do not expect justice here where they never charge men of robbing us with violence which they so often do!”(35).

In *Leading the Night*, Rika’s daughters’, Uhai and Hariri, suggest hope. “Uhai” is a Kiswahili word for life. She represents the new generation that would take over from the old generation that has exploited the marginalized subject. She understands and respects her mother’s cause. Just like her name, she will give the marginalized subjects a chance to live without much struggles and worries. Rika works hard and sacrifices so that her children may have a better tomorrow. Wairi hails from a village known as “*Gitina Giathina*,” (168) Gikuyu words which means “bottom of poverty or trouble” (168). The name of the village insinuates that the residents of the village are extremely poor. One

may interpret it as the genesis of trouble. This would thus mean that Wairi's struggles began at birth and have since followed her; the fact that she lives in Mathare valley, a shanty residence, confirms this. Her life thus depicts a cyclic replication of hardships.

The narrator in *Beyond the Darkness* uses nicknames to refer to Jeff and his fellow criminals. For instance, Geoffrey Kimani Waitara (alias Jeff) acquires different names to suit him at any particular moment. Jeff changes his name from Jeff to Michael (163) when he moves to Banana Hill. This name suits him as he appears as a mature family man who has just moved in to the area. When he escapes to Tanzania, he changes his name to James Kibwana (190), a common name in Tanzania. The change of names helps him to avoid suspicion from the locals who might want to know much about him and allows him to interact easily with them. Jeff changes his name to Mandevu (339) once he crosses the border. He gets the name due to his overgrown beard "Mandevu" a Kiswahili word for the same. This nickname hides his identity and allows him to interact with other people without any suspicion. Isaac, a friend constantly refers to Jeff as "Blazer" (236) a nickname he receives when he was matatu driver because of his ability to evade the police officers' trap when he was in the wrong. His criminal gang on the other hand refers to him as "Boss" (137). Mbogo (alias Man Mess) and other gang members refer to him as the boss because he commands the gang. Jeff constantly acquires a new name to help him escape from the police officers. His constant change of names also denotes his instability and untrustworthiness.

Point of View and the Narrative Voice

Leading the Night combines the omniscient and the second person point of view in the narration. The second person address helps the narrator to draw the readers closer to the narrator especially when discussing issues that have a Kenyan – national face which the narrator seems to have established as an empathetically shared space as earlier discussed in chapter two. The omniscient point of view on the other hand enables the narrator to peer into the thought processes of the characters and to have a complete knowledge of the actions and thoughts of the characters irrespective of the narrator's position during narration. *Leading the Night* employs only one narrative voice. Narrative voice according to Seymour Chatman is different from the point of view. For Chatman:

point of view is the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation. Voice, on the contrary, refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience. Point of view does *not* mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made. (153)

The narrative voice in *Leading the Night* is abrasive in its depictions, at times revealing traces of anger, irritation, and frustration towards the male gender. The narrative voice in *Leading the Night* is more overt compared to that in *Beyond the Darkness*. This is because the presentation of the issues in *Leading the Night* appears more as politicking in that it betrays an overt distrust for men and the state as earlier discussed in chapter two.

Beyond the Darkness employs the omniscient point of view. The events in the story unfold through the eyes of the omniscient narrator. The narrator is invisible and the

readers are unaware of anything but an intrusive voice that observes, reports and comments on the events and thought processes of the characters. The narrative voice is neutral and non-judgmental because it presents the events in a natural manner without bias.

This chapter has explored how the two novels, *Beyond the Darkness* and *Leading the Night*, foreground the notion of dystopia through employment of various literary strategies. The chapter has argued that the two authors deliberately use these strategies to paint a picture of characters faced by serious social economic and political challenges, and their various struggles to envision better social economic futures for themselves and those around them. In addition, the chapter has examined the social vision projected by the two novels that irrespective of the social economic and political challenges that characterize the lives of the marginalized subjects, individuals have ability to transcend these if only they use legitimate methods to confront the forces that repress them. This is achieved through foregrounding characters who overcome the forces of repression juxtaposed to characters that use alternative modes of articulation to voice their dissatisfaction. The failure of characters who engage in subversive alternative modes of action serves as a caveat against such modes. The two authors however show little hope that the state agents can change. Throughout the narrative, the construct state agents as self-centered and therefore unable to effect any positive change in their communities.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored how the two novels *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness* reveal the notion of dystopia and project certain social visions as a strategy to destabilize the dystopic atmosphere in the narratives. I chose to analyze the two novels alongside each other because they address common concerns on the challenges experienced by the urban marginalized subjects in modern Kenya. A reading through the two novels has revealed that the urban poor are marginalized by various contesting social economic and political factors. Consequently, the marginalized subjects consciously or unconsciously seek alternative modes of articulation to voice their discontent. Unfortunately, most of the chosen modes of action paradoxically entrap these characters and hence lead them to further disarticulation.

Leading the Night features characters pitted in a hostile postcolonial Kenyan state that is infested by corruption, injustice, crime, poor governance, drug abuse, poverty, violence, prostitution and other repressive conditions. As a result, the characters are disillusioned by both their oppressive environment and failure of their attempted means to free themselves off the marginalized state. Prostitution stands out as one of the socially unsanctioned engagement the characters involve themselves in. The study has shown that prostitution gives the female characters an opportunity to voice themselves. Sexually exploited and abused, the female prostitutes finally resort to voluntary prostitution to gain financial stability and to avenge wrongs meted out on them. This situation is evident in Deni, Wairi and other female prostitutes whose material condition is improved by prostitution and their self esteem is paradoxically restored. By focusing on the plight of the prostitutes, the narrative seeks to castigate the failed state structures and policies that

would possibly mitigate further marginalization of such commercial sex workers. In addition, the presentation of their plight calls to the attention on the futility of engaging such subversive conducts in confronting marginalization because they paradoxically empower and subject the victims to further disarticulation.

The study has also shown that more often the characters project their discontent on one another. In the end, the marginalized urban poor find themselves victims of both the gangs of the rich and of the underworld gangs. This is captured in the two novels *Leading the Night* and *Beyond the Darkness* that were under study. Through the use of a shanty setting, *Beyond the Darkness* reveals the high levels of insecurity facing the residents of Mukuru wa Rukungu Valley. The insecurity in the valley is worsened by the fact that the residents mete out violence to one another. More so, their situation is compounded by the fact that the urban poor cannot access justice since judicial institutions privilege the wealthy class over the poor.

The same concerns are also raised in *Leading the Night*. The novel's setting arouses the mood of despair, disillusionment and resignation as the characters are unable to confront the forces of repression without falling to further disarticulation. Rika's attempt to exposes the various forces of repression signals a ray of hope that the situation may change however gradual the pace may take. Unfortunately, this change can only be felt indirectly if the leaders heed to the demand of the people as the one imaginatively set by fictive the Mandela Literary Award in the novel.

The two novels depict the Kenyan state as constituted by failed instruments and organs of governance. For example, *Leading the Night* references not-so-long ago events in postcolonial Kenya history. Examples include the recent trend of bombings since 1998, a series of corruption scandals like the Goldenberg which remains unresolved up to date, the maize scandal in (2009-2010), and the attack of a media house (2006). The narrative is thus a gesture that points to the need for more involvement in the project of unmasking the unscrupulous politik it is witness of and testifies to. More so, the narrative makes us aware of these existing problems and redresses what it perceives as savage reaction by the state in an attempt to silence criticism from the public. As evident in the two novels, the stories derive their semantic force through their constant reminder to the reader that they are engaged in a corrective ideological politik. They achieve this by situating fictional characters in an existing/real geo-political sphere called Kenya. Thus the narratives present themselves as embedded in the story of Kenya.

Despite their shared thematic concerns, I have examined the different approaches the two novels use to narrate dystopia. While both novels use omniscient narrators, *Leading the Night* predominantly employs an overt narration. The narrator frequently uses rhetorical figures, imagery, evaluative phrases, emotive or subjective expressions to draw a clear view of how the narrator perceives something. More so, the narrator frequently intrudes into the narration to give perspective on the issue being narrated in the story. This approach creates a distinction in the manner in which the two novels narrate dystopia. Ikonya's *Leading the Night* appears more as politicking because the voice is highly overt and thus the readers feel as if the narrator is giving a subjective point of view rather than

that of the characters involved. Nonetheless, the issues raised in *Beyond the Darkness* validate those raised in *Leading the Night* as representative of the problems affecting the marginalized urban subjects in modern Kenya. *Leading the Night* exhibits a loosely packed narrative which in effect reflects the dystopian world of the characters. Kibera's *Beyond the Darkness* majorly employs the covert narration. The narrator lets the narrative unfold at its natural sequence and tempo without attempting to impose the events in the narration.

To capture the notion of dystopia and to project a social vision, the two novels foreground dystopia using different narrative strategies and techniques. The study has shown the literary techniques help paint a vivid mental picture of the challenges the marginalized subjects go through and demand the reader(s) to consider whether such violation of the human rights experienced by the marginalized subjects as depicted in the texts should continue to happen. This study reveals the challenges experienced by the marginalized subjects in modern Kenya such as corruption, unemployment, injustice, poverty and the characters' various attempts to confront such repressive forces. The study also reveals the existing gaps in power structures which contribute to the absence and failure of state's policy. In *Leading the Night* the narrator highlights these gaps by depicting the leaders as overly individualistic and driven by vested interests such that they only involve the poor marginalized subjects as alibis and signatories when they want to benefit themselves.

The two theories used in this study have helped to put in focus the voices of the marginalized subjects as they struggle to be heard. Gayatri Spivak's theorization of the

subaltern helped illuminate the challenges that circumscribing the marginalized subjects in their search for meaningful livelihood amidst different regimes of tyranny. From the study it is clear that the marginalized subjects do not have a voice and as a result they resort to alternative modes of expression to make themselves heard. However, most of their chosen modes of action only results in further disarticulation. The study has shown that that the marginalized subjects can only overcome this disarticulation if they engage constructively with the little available resources and agents of transformation such as education to counter their disarticulation.

Although Ikonya's and Kibera's works have received inadequate literary criticism, the study has shown that their works are of great literary significance and merit more adequate attention than has been given previously. Being recent artistic outputs, the two novels have addressed issues of the day most of which were presumed legally settled during independence. Thus through art, the two authors create awareness of the challenges affecting the marginalized subjects in modern Kenya and imaginatively resolve these challenges presented in the novelistic world thereby putting into focus the need to revise how the modern Kenyan society addresses these issues. This study adds to the existing works on dystopia; more so, it contributes greatly to the study of dystopia in modern Kenyan fiction which has not been sufficiently attended to.

In conclusion, I suggest a reading on modern protest literature to address how modern Kenya addresses issues of a failed state. This would create an opening to address some of the social, economic and political challenges facing the modern Kenyan nation through art.

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