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Peter Pan in Nairobi: Masculinity's Postcolonial City

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell) as it is represented in the Spear Books series, a subsidiary of East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi. I discuss three intersecting layers of the masculine gender order as reproduced by the series (1970–90): the colonial literary legacy of masculine city 'rambling'; the local (African) specificity of changing gender identities; and the impacts of globalization. The thematic thread I pursue is the proposition about the adult-as-child (Peter Pan) as a brutalizing aspect of 'masculinity in relation' (with man and woman). The masculine order of violence in the city is explained in terms of its colonial past as a segregated city and its postcolonial and international claims for recognition. I talk about a crisis in 'Kenyan men.'

Keywords: Nairobi, African masculinities, Crime fiction Africa, Whore, Rape Africa

The postcolonial city is anchored in a historical and spatial double-bind: freed from colonial authority but immersed in neo-colonial politics and practice of de-humanizing commoditisation, whose major emblems are hunger and violence. Such a troubled social urban culture feeds on a gender order of injustice and inequality. What Robert Connell calls patriarchal dividend amounts to nothing less (or more) than the way in which men assert their privilege of controlling women and other men. Patriarchy as a structure of subordination dominates Nairobi, the city in the focus of this essay. Translated into everyday street corner practices and viewpoints, hegemonic masculinity involves the transformation of the city into masculine zones and the feminine non-places (where women can be but only as 'other') and the ever-present rampant use of homophobia and heterosexual violence. R. W. Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees … the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2005) is not grounded in studies of postcolonial masculinities, and may seem to be an anachronistic point of departure here, but I find it constructive for its characterization of asymmetric gender relations as 'practices' ('what men do') as well as its proposition about the dynamics of change. 'Masculinity' (like 'femininity') is a fictional construct that carries no meaning outside its materialised and culturalized expression. By "[c]urrently accepted answers," Connell seems to suggest that we deal with transient phenomena; hegemonic masculinities have the propensities to change as any other societal form and

also, he suggests, that they *should* change to prevent men and women from killing each other. So 'what men do', and 'why', are questions, I claim, that must be asked at any time, by any scholar, whatever the material and symbolic background we prefer to examine in our project to learn more about ourselves and others.

My inquiry concerns the representations of masculinity in a group of literary texts produced in Nairobi between 1960 and 1990 called the Spear Books (a former Heinemann imprint), a subsidiary of East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi. I want to discuss the functions of the two parameters of colonialism and modernity (globalization) in their formulations of masculinity. What masculinities emerge in a multilayered, hybrid text torn between intersecting views of local (African) concepts of the positioning of the man, the legacy of colonialism, and the impacts of modernity and globalization. In order to situate the Spear Books' affiliations within a Western narrative tradition of masculinity and the city, I will draw some parallels between the series' fictionalized men and the male protagonists of nineteenth-century city 'rambler' stories (and a Woody Allen film). My main discussion centres on the male identity construction as an embodiment of the gender politics of the African postcolonial city. I will try to show how a certain type of stereotypical masculinity, Peter Pan or the "boy-who-never-grows-up," may be identified as an intersectional emblem in the popular fiction of the city, piecing together elements from diverse traditions (European and African). A major thrust of the essay will focus on a discussion of two distinct groups of the Spears, the 1970's and the 1980–90's: What do they tell us about a postcolonial 'masculinity-in-relation' (in relation to femininity and to children)? Is masculinity a prime signifier at all? What is the role of infringing globalization? Do the stories propel a vision of change? Has masculinity become less violent and dominating than Connell hoped for? Is Nairobi a blueprint of London?

The underdog male walking into the big city with itching hands and an itching crotch is a well-known literary figure. These city rogues, womanizers, fortune-hunters, petty criminals have populated English fiction since the Renaissance, charming their ways also into the boudoirs of the haves, and domesticating, gendering and troubling the spaces they have transgressed. Interestingly, this is also the protocol of Woody Allen's latest (2005) film *Match Point* where Allen tells a conventional story about an Irish former tennis pro, Chris Wilton, who, true to his generic youthful reputation, hoaxes an aristocratic family, marries the all-too-willing daughter and cons the father mogul, while he himself typically succumbs to the erotic pull of another loser, a struggling American actress whom he predictably, as a consequence, retaliates against. The setting is equally posh London (not a familiar turf for Allen, as the British critics have gleefully pointed out); touristy localities (the banks of the Thames by Westminster, Bond Street, and the Tate Modern) are viewed or visited as if objects in a guided city tour of London. The London map of wealth is re-inscribed by being crossed, its boundaries (rich/poor, male/female, Irish/English/American) re-installed and re-figured in a melodrama sustained by

the fast car drive and a pontificating and alienating male gaze. Chris Wilton infringes on (for him) zones of illegitimacy, both in a social context and topographically. In metonymic terms, Allen's masculine narrative of the city is consolidated by being endlessly activated and displayed, but also by being problematized, femininity in the film is contrastively annulled by death, rejection and passivity. Men move on, in a kind of juvenile furore and occasionally crumble in their ache for public recognition; women on the other hand stand still (in the film – die) or surrender – strategically or not – to the masculine matrix. Is this Allen's contribution to an empire-building ideology?

"Gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not a social practice reduced to the body," says Connell (2005: 71). Masculinities are configurations of practice formed by gender relations; in this imagery men's mobility is accentuated by women's inertia. This dichotomy is highly active in early nineteenth-century London city texts (travelogues, stories, poems) that celebrate men's walking or rambling shopping streets, arcades, bazaars, and other urban public locations (clubs, theatres, pubs, taverns). One could claim that it is in this tradition that the city personage that we saw made flesh in Allen's Chris Wilton, the lusty man of leisure in search of adventure and sex, and which we will meet in the Nairobi Spear Books, had its offspring. "The urban rambler," explains Jane Rendell (1998) in her essay in *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, "articulates his masculinity through dress and language codes, and through various kinds of spatialised social activities." Chris Wilton migrated, we are given to understand, from a mundane Irish working-class background into the *crème de la crème* in and around the City of London. The early nineteenth-century male London escapades were similarly organized to juxtapose the two antagonistic class zones of dreary east and fashionable west. The east figured as extremely poor, with a racially mixed working-class, and immigrants (mainly Irish at this time), and the west populated by members of the aristocracy, nobility and wealthy bourgeois class. The source of excitement for the protagonists is the gulf between the two, both as a spatial sensory incitement and a beguiling social spectacle and provocation. Notice the tone of self-indulgence and rant in the following. The speaker is N. S. Wheaton and the time is 1823/4:

> This day has been wholly devoted to a ramble about London, to look at curiosities. A friend called on me after breakfast, and proposed an excursion; and we accordingly took our way through St. Giles', that paradise of usquebaugh [Irish or Scots whiskey] and 'blue ruin' [gin], to which low Irish resort on coming to London. Such a place of filth, and tipsy jollity, and nocturnal rows, and squalid wretchedness, is no where [sic] to be found, except on 'Saffron Hill' in the vicinity of Fleet Ditch [today's Fleet Street, in Victorian times a sewer-like river] where a large proportion of the indigenous poverty of the metropolis is congregated (Wheaton 1830)[1].

1 Quoted in Rendell, p. 78.

The cityscape ramble unites a world of titillating contrasts and desires: taking its departure in the rich part of London that apparently only can offer boring "curiosities" to the visitors and extending into the spectacular and the more interesting slums (for them) in the eastern parts, a "paradise" for the pleasure-seeking, whoring and drinking gentleman. It is a fetishlike landscape, attractive and repulsive, commodified and held at a distance, what Marx calls the "veil of reification."[2] "Tipsy jollity" intersects with "filth," as if part of the same root system, "nocturnal rows," feasts on "squalid wretchedness" in this paraphrase of a patriarchal act of juvenile empowering. The commentator is right in observing the influx of poor Irishmen and -women at this time, and the squalor of the district, although Charles Dickens also stresses its more affirmative side of 'healthy' entrepreneurship and commercialism[3]. In fact London's population grew at an enormous speed during the first part the century, from one million to two. And as a consequence, London was becoming a metropolis with, indeed, "indigenous poverty," but also a city from which people migrated, and it was the same poor who did so. In the 1830s, over 100,000 persons emigrated annually; in the 1840s, over 200,000. Their destinations were Canada, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, and also the United States. Dickens' flamboyant and lively metaphor of characterizing Saffron Hill trade activities as "a commercial colony of itself: the emporium of petty larceny" (see note 5) is an appropriate and sinister prophesy of what Britain was to become during the next century: an empire based on stealing, looting, and appropriating.

About seventy years later, in 1900, Nairobi was such a station on an expanding British imperial map, although at the time only an unhealthy labour camp along the advancing Mombasa-Uganda railway, consisting mainly of temporary bazaars with Indian labourers and traders and European officials. A map from 1901 does not even mention the "African Nairobi" that, along with two other "Nairobis" (the European and the Indian), was to organize segregation along racial and gender lines. Nairobi, today a metropolis of over 2 million people, characterized by social exclusiveness, ghettos, with half of its population living below the poverty line, has developed out of colonial settlement strategies

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[2] Quoted in Abigail Solomon-Godeau, p. 269.

[3] "Near to the spot on which Snow Hill and Holborn Hill meet, there opens, upon the right hand as you come out of the City, a narrow and dismal alley leading to Saffron Hill. In its filthy shops are exposed for sale huge bunches of second-hand silk handkerchiefs, of all sizes and patterns; for here reside the traders who purchase them from pickpockets. Hundreds of these handkerchiefs hang dangling from pegs outside the windows or flaunting from the door-posts; and the shelves, within, are piled with them. Confined as the limits of Field Lane are, it has its barber, its coffee-shop, its beer-shop, and its fried-fish warehouse. It is *a commercial colony of itself: the emporium of petty larceny*: visited at early morning, and setting-in of dusk, by silent merchants, who traffic in dark back-parlours, and who go as strangely as they come. Here, the clothesman, the shoe-vamper, and the rag-merchant, display their goods, as sign-boards to the petty thief; here, stores of old iron and bones, and heaps of mildewy fragments of woollen-stuff and linen, rust and rot in the grimy cellars." (Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1838; London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994) 225-26, (my emphasis).

and a thirst for monopoly capitalism that Dickens foresaw. The oblique economic organization of the city, its division into a formal and informal (self-help) sector, is the result of European industrialization and modernity. In this structural way, the city resembles Victorian London and its divisions along the limits of race, gender and class.

The colonial legacy infiltrates the contemporary writing of/in Nairobi in endless overlapping ways. The parameters of the have and the have-not frame all culture work. No poem, no novel, no theatre play remains unaffected by the experiences contained in such inequalities. Urban fiction in the Nairobi of the 1970's and 1980–90's – which is the period when the city developed into a monstrous and unplanned metropolis (as London did in the 1830–40's) – has an equivalent also in its sharing the literary 'rambler' masculine conventions that we discussed earlier. Such links are hardly accidental. Nairobi colonial and modernist culture swallowed up metropolitan trends – imitated and squashed them into moulds of their own masculine sheen. It is the gendering of this literary import I will examine in the following.

Spear Books is a colonial hybrid. The book series started to emerge in the early 1970's and became also an immense success among the book vendors in the streets of Nairobi. Most of these simple stories about crime and high-life write the city as a flourishing international newcomer of super high pretensions in a modernist capitalist world community. Nairobi was to be the first 'real' African city, no longer only a railhead or a crossroads for safari-hungry Westerners. The first generation of Spear Books depicted, off-handedly as it were, urban dislocation and growth, what Raymond F. Betts has called the "landscape of discontent," but was not prepared to respond to the problems of the angry poor (Betts 1998: 51). The protagonists of the novels depict the colonial city in the same stand-by mode as the innocuous male outsiders in Wheaton's nineteenth-century narrative; they ogle without seeing.

It is the prestigious finance centre in Nairobi, with its hotels, banks and large avenues and offices that provide the points of departure for the city strollers. Their prime touchdowns occur within the parameters of Hilton Hotel and Norfolk Hotel. This is the grid that Western tourists to the city even today are locked within. Here is Ahmed; a doctor newly arrived from India, stopping outside the Norfolk with his girlfriend.

> As Ahmed parked the car, he saw bright lights dazzling his eyes. They were from the National Theatre. The posters suggested that it was the opening night for *The King and I*. He held Miss Gechago's hand as they crossed the road to go into the Norfolk. … People were sitting in the front porch veranda of the hotel. … The veranda with its red tiles fitted the scene perfectly. … Children wee playing around it [a colonial rickshaw], sitting in it and admiring it. To Ahmed, in the flickering lights shining from the National Theatre, it was such as a delightful scene. His tender feelings were always roused by children in contrast to women who only tickled the carnal part of him (Dawood 1978: 23).

For the Indian migrant, this area so steeped in Western epistemology and culture, lends him authority and exclusivity. His imagining of the place translates, ironically, as the scene demonstrates, into a colonial desire of subordination: his eroticized assimilationist vocabulary centres on a fantasy interplay between himself, children and woman. We are taken into the "nervous condition" that underpins (Fanon-Bhabha) the colonial subject's masculinity, translating it into mimic acts. In this scene, for instance, the National Theatre, the city's most prestigious site for colonial culture, is appropriated in a 'reversed' gesture of accommodation. The spatial memory of this place on Harry Thuku Road exudes a form of moral guidance that empowers Ahmed. I will return to the child-male syndrome embedded here at the end of this discussion.

A majority of these Spear Books were formatted on crime fiction's superficial attraction to the metropolitan underworld. They, too, were eager to launch Nairobi as a convincing partner in a global economy where international crime represents one of its postmodernist sideshows. A 'manhattanization' infiltrated the narratives absurdly alienating them from or twisting the language world that they were part of. The theme of international crime unites books such as Magaga Alot's *A Girl Cannot Go on Laughing All the Time* (1975), Mwangi Ruheni's *The Mystery Smugglers* (1975) and *The Love Root* (1976), Mwangi Gicheru's *The Ivory Merchant* (1976), and Frank Saisi's *The Bhang Syndicate* (1984). By gesturing towards an outside world of criminal affiliations involving the import and export of illegal goods, out-of-the country travels, and an evolving tourist industry, Nairobi is identified as a city of some substance and modernity, a very masculine and heterosexual city. They honed in with the petty dream world of the aspirant criminal, imitated the sexist and misogynist street jargon and its coercive, hectic masculine body movements. These are the first lines of the most popular Spear Books novels of them all, Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* from 1971, now a classic (Mangua 1978). We listen to the swaggering adolescent Dodge Kiunya introducing himself in his brio macho jargon:

> Son of woman, that's me. I am a louse, a blinking louse and I am the jigger in the toe. I am a hungry jigger and I like to bite. I like to bite women – beautiful women. Women with tits that bounce. If you do not like the idea you are the type I am least interested in. (7)

Characteristically, in his meanderings he is strolling from the financial centre, with its Western hotels, bookshops and administration buildings, to Eastleigh, the slums, in pursuit of sexual pleasure and adventure. His itinerary crosses boundaries, takes him step by step into a hinterland or "Neverland" (Peter Pan) of urban chaos, projecting, as do the protagonists in the London excursion of one hundred and fifty years earlier, an agenda of male self-absorption and self-aggrandisement:

> I walk towards Eastleigh. They are always dusty my shoes. I can't afford shoe polish and the shoe-shine boys would not even lend me their brush. … I never realized that it was such a long walk from the centre of

> Nairobi to the Eastleigh slums. My old car has grown a beard. The damn thing wouldn't start and it is growing moss and lichens at Tigoni Police Station, where they dumped it after dumping me in jail. … I am a graduate. That is what I am. A graduate. University of London Geography Honours at Makerere and I can't get a job. … I have arrived at Eastleigh. It's two-thirty and the sun is melting my head. I have little hair on my dome because the first thing they do when you are received in the cooler is unhair your head. The roofs are shimmering everywhere and the smell of dust, dirt and prostitutes is offending my nostrils. … There is a prostitute standing there and there is a prostitute standing here. There are prostitutes standing everywhere. Maybe some are not, but they all look alike. They are hungry for money. It's written on their faces. Can't help them. Not me. I don't have a cent. (14–15)

The protagonist not only traverses an urban topography of colonialism-induced inequalities but is also emerging literally out of its university and prison. His decline symbolizes the social disgrace emerging from and making nil of his position as a recipient of the elite education that has been overpoweringly male. A 'been-to' – a term that signifies those who had been to metropolitan or colonial universities as he has – who failed to provide was a shame to his community, and a blow to his gender identity. Descending the social ladder, as figured in Dodge Kiunya's rambling from the 'centre' to the 'periphery,' brings into focus colonialism's most momentous contribution to a totalizing new world: the money economy or capitalism. But what is also at stake is the undermining of what Margrethe Silberschmidt, in her study of male unemployment in Kisii (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam, calls "the normative order of patriarchy," the fact men can no longer maintain their authority as their heads of households and as breadwinners. "Contrary to women, who have actively created new roles for themselves, men have not been able to do so" (Silberschmidt 2005: 195, 200). Dodge's fall from grace follows this pattern. The identity of his only partner in this new world order, the car, is besmirched, we notice, too; its/his 'masculinity' has been smothered and its body, like that of its human associate Dodge with his dusty shoes and sensitive nose, transmits the stigma of dirt, a major metaphor in these texts for categorizing the prostitute. But the dirt that sticks to Dodge's body and that of his car is ephemeral. For the prostitute to be 'cleansed', she has either to return to her rural roots (which in most cases means to re-enter tribal [most often Kikuyu] patriarchal arrangements) or marry a man. For Dodge, it is simpler; he can return to the Centre or also marry; in fact he did. Dodge comes to realize and recognize that the women at dystopia's lowest point have risen as his equals in the sense that they compete with him for the money available. The city workplace obeys no given or traditional rules. This does not mean that the gender order has become less asymmetrical, that the Nairobi prostitutes are 'femmes libres'. It means that Dodge's recuperation of his crushed male ego requires two activist masculinist strategies: the dehumanization ("they all look alike") and contamination of women ("dust, dirt, and prostitutes"), to be restored

at least momentarily. The ultimate bonus of such empowerment is the masculine salvage tale: Dodge's missionary feats of marrying a whore and, as a masculine narrative exit option, moving to the coast and buying a "beach cottage" (159), is one such romance of recuperation of loss.

In the 1980's and 1990's Spear Books, the hero's exit assumed a less moral significance as the series took on more explorative topics in its delineation of city life. The elaborate novelistic figuration of the Nairobi shanty townships, the notion of the city as a larger, heterogeneous place, evolved in this period. The following extract from another Spear Book, Thomas Akare's *Twilight Woman* (1988), highly embedded with references to the UN Woman Conference (1985), is an attempt at offering an alternative or feminist version of city rambling. But the result is the reverse. The sequential ordering of the stops of the walk, the meticulous naming of the streets, the locations and the topographical hierarchies, and the emphasis on material consumption, loyally adhere to the masculinist convention that we are familiar with, here accentuated defiantly by parading male authorship. Again, we are made aware of the changed or changing infrastructure of the streets: the street walker (a woman) and the beggar (a man) compete for the same dole in the same locale (Agadjanian 2005). The streetwalker is confronted by his/her 'new' equal and escapes to assuage the humiliation (" The man had no left arm and right leg. They avoided his sight"). To meet the eyes of the beggar would be to recognize him. To meet the eyes of the prostitute is to see her hunger (which Dodge could). Not 'seeing' them is to manifest power. Movement, mobility, passing, traversing, fast driving, etc provide such possibilities and opportunities. This is how the masquerade is presented:

> They bought knickers and brassieres. From there they went to the right and crossed Tom Mboya street on to Latema Road. In Maggy's mind ran pictures of those gambling machines down there in the play room. They branched and took Munyu Road noticing an amputee outside Umina bar. The man had no left arm and right leg. They avoided his sight. They branched off and took Gaberon Road, and walked past a music store which played a Lingala tune, *Ata Nayebi*. They walked down into Kibichiku Hotel for some roast meat. Each of them was now in need of quenching thirst. Maggy proposed Kaka Night Club. (140)

The male protagonist in the next two decades of Spear Books publishing emerged as an often sharp-eyed witness of social decay and turmoil in the slums but also as an agent of/in the same degradation. This archetype can be characterized as an expressive structure of anti-social and repressive behaviour whose object is both woman and self. I call him tentatively Peter Pan, after J. M. Barrie's eponymous creation. The metaphor contains different sub-types: the drinker/the whorer; the misogynist; the racist/the homophobic; and the rapist/the killer. (The Spear Books series also projects a kindred but *pro*-social, ideological or idealistic male activist; cf. the persona in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's prison narrative, *Detained.*) The male identities in Wamagunda Geteria's *Nice*

People and Charles K. Githae's *A Worm in the Head*, embody the whole spectrum of what contains male oppression, including its "chasing of its own tail," that is, its capacity for self-infliction (Geteria 1992; Githae 1987). Fred in Githae's novel is this kind of a self-pitying male subject with his endless rambling pursuit of shelter, comfort, stimulation, and sexual service. He is misogynist, rapist, and drunkard: "She did not scream and I quickly wrestled her to the ground. Her parcel flew into the bushes. She lay on her back and after a bit of struggle, I had my way" [51], but also a racist, kicking and slandering both Asians and gay men. The violence he resorts to is raw and psychopathic. Geteria's story, less of a drinker's and a whoremonger's self-denigrating, violent tale, is an apology for men's abuse of women, here under the narrative guise of a medical doctor's diary offering (men only) advice about protecting themselves against AIDS. The women in his story feature as an ideal combination of the nurse and the prostitute; most often they are both in the same person. Interestingly, the adolescent men thwarted by the Peter Pan syndrome (men claiming women/ prostitutes/ mothers/ relatives to nurse, shelter, and assist them) also feature as the most embittered, nihilistic consumers of both alcohol and sex, a practice that, literally, takes them downhill to a point of no-return (in Nairobi landscape terminology, this point is Mathare valley and its slums). The anti-heroic no-exit narrative formula of these Spears distinguishes them from the earlier ones, and also from the literary conventions of male rambling where the 'traveller,' as a rule, returns to normality mesmerized, enlightened, and emboldened. All of John Kiriamiti's very popular Spear Book novels, *My Life in Crime*, *My Life with a Criminal* and *Son of Fate*, belong here, as do Charles Mangua's much-acclaimed best sellers *Son of Woman* (which we have discussed) and *A Tail in the Mouth* (Kiriamiti 1984, 1989, 1994; Mangua 1988). A local readership evidently took pleasure in reading these semi-autobiographical tales of urban disgust, hatred and violence, centred on the peregrinating lone male in search of some kind of "meaning in life" in which women – at best – performed the roles of loyal assistants or nurturers. In other words: the later Spear Books' aggressive homophobic topoi and masculine archetypes advance or reflect a masculinist politics that is segregationist and dangerous. Postcolonial masculinity is figured as a crisis in ideology in bodily-social terms (Robinson 2000).

I wish to end this discussion by turning to the theme that predicates the discussion above: the masculine politics of man as child, the Peter Pan syndrome. Urban representation is adamantly physical and biological; agents and protagonists touch, see, are seen, smell, hear, are heard (which, as we have see, do not warrant contact); they embody variables of age and gender; they embody age- and gender-in-relation. The knowable (I) and the unknown (other) are clinched into some kind of reciprocity that always threatens to dissipate, or actually does dissipate. Nothing is really stable and safe; fears, dangers, risks and pleasure intertwine. The tours in London exude adolescent agitation in their nervous preoccupation with bodily gratification and ideological distancing. Allen's *Match Point* visualizes such a growing sense of panic. The early Nairobi

Spear Books celebrate and embody the casual young street stroller at his moment of conquest. The later Spears feature the same persona, but now dislocated and slowly disintegrating, a pathetic figuration of postcolonial masculinity. In all these dichotomised configurations, femininity (mother, lover, and sister) is subordinated and conceptualized as nurses, prostitutes, and associates. The child theme is played out in many ways.

The fairytale discourse with monsters, the beauty and the beast, and the tame and the wild infiltrate these recordings of masculinity and city life; they feed on the child's realms of perceiving his or her surroundings as a game where the grotesque and the 'normal' are spatially separated, but where also the crossing of the borderlines between them is irresistible. Crossing and transgressing become ways of embodying the city and performing masculinity; of accessing it and rejecting it; of making the borders turn live or dead, fertile or stagnant by being touched. We have seen these transformations take place. Maps and identities are created promoting ideals of growth and maturity; routes to self-understanding and personal vindication are laid out, which in the end turn out to be dead-ends. The child, we have seen, becomes the metaphor for the concept of adult-as-child, a figuration of escape into irresponsibility. A comparison could be made with Walter Benjamin's Berlin essays, where masculinity is performatively conceptualized in a similar manner. "A recurrent theme of the Berlin texts," says Graeme Gilloch, "is Benjamin's desire to cross topographical (hence class) thresholds.… To recognize yet disregard the invisible boundaries of the cityscape – this is the desire of the child and the regret of the adult" (Gilloch 1996: 85). As a last instance of the figuration of adolescent masculinity, in F.M. Genga-Idowu's *Lady in Chains* Nairobi features partly as a whore, a mother-monster, and a child, and as such it is both disempowered and empowering (Genga-Idowu 1993):

> Nairobi lay fettered by blessings and woes. The day and night clubs screaming down at her round the clock bring woe to her sleeping children. The skyscrapers and freshly mowed lawns of Lavington and Muthaiga bless her with beauty. Karen and State House powder her face to make her bright. Scabbies attack her hands placed in Kibera, Kangemi, Kariobangi, Korogocho, Kawangware and Kayole. Under her dress – a rare material consisting of a blend of heterogeneous fabrics – lies an infectious gangrene named Mathare. Under her chin, an army of fungi named Majengo mobilize as extensively as they attack. In her womb lie quadruplets sucking away the labour of her hands. She is the source of life and the giver of goodies and guidelines to her offspring. Their heartbeat is her own. (60)

She is, we notice, a "fettered" body, contained in a Rabelaisian selfhood of the multitudinous, both plagued and rewarded by her lot, but imprisoned also by her destiny as a subordinated woman under hegemonic masculinity. Genga-Idowu's juxtaposition of contrasting social zones structured around poverty and affluence – with Lavington's mown lawns on one side and Majengo's fungi on the other –

combine in forming the wider setting of Nairobi city as a bounded, monstrous complex of human geography laden with inequality and oppression. It is a monster!

We left Ahmed on the Norfolk Hotel terrace meditating about his state as migrant and ex-colonial and noticed the text's use of biologism to delineate his complex subject position. The idea of the child "rouses" feelings of tenderness in him (submission), that of woman desire (occupation); masculinity seeks relational sustenance and psychic power to allay the humiliations that the past has inflicted on him. Here is another version of the double-bind that I talked about at the beginning of this essay. A double-bind that I find characterizes the 'postcolonial masculinity/ies ' as represented in Nairobi Spear Books fiction. It is a layered, violent and self-abusing construct impregnated by the colonial views on masculine prerogatives, by injections of situational and local changes in patriarchal control and the despair they have obtained, and the impacts of global, impoverishing economies.

No, the stories do not propel a vision of change, in answer to my question at the beginning! I am afraid they do exactly the opposite: violence, rape, and domination structure Spear Book masculinity (Ousgane 2006), countersigning, in fact, the current situation in Kenya, where it is estimated that as many as 60 per cent of all women have experienced sexual abuse and where a woman or child is raped every 30 minutes (McGuffin 2006). Are we, then, witnessing the 'crises of African men'? And, even more so, perhaps, a crisis of Nairobi and Kenya?

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