

Humanism and the Urban Spaces in Meja Mwangi's Novels

Ombati, Martha Flavian (Sr.)

Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology- Bondo- Kenya

Abstract

Humanism is a conscious awareness and reciprocal actions of being humane. An individual's efforts to be humane and to realize fully their own humanity is affected by the forces within and outside him or her. One of the roles of literature is to toy with this question of humanism, to describe its condition and how individuals strive to realize and exercise their humanity. This paper examines humanism and the urban environment as depicted in the selected novels of Kenya's popular novelist, Meja Mwangi. To this end, Meja Mwangi's popular fiction, *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) was critiqued in researching this question, given that literature reflects reality. The texts are Mwangi's urban trilogy, among his forty-six novels. The study was qualitative in approach, employing analytical research design in the collection and analysis of data. The gathered data was analysed through content analysis. The study population comprised Kenyan popular fiction, with a special focus on novels by Meja Mwangi. The study further focused on Mwangi's novels that are forty-six in number. Purposive sampling technique was employed with the inclusion criterion being Mwangi's novels that address the humanistic issues being investigated. The sampled texts were Mwangi's three urban-based novels mentioned above. The data was collected through close textual reading. Data collected was categorised along with the study's units of analysis, namely Mwangi's thematic concerns on humanism, characterisation, and narrative techniques. From the findings, a close reading of *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road* and *The Cockroach Dance* unravel instances and encounters with characters entangled in twists of fate in an urban locale. This is revealed through their actions, utterances and behaviour. It is also evident that the trilogy, particularly *Kill Me Quick* chronicles both rural and urban environments, whereas the other two centre on an urban locale. However, many issues have been raised in these novels about the urban space with its dislocation of individuals' humane dispositions as their moral and cultural values gradually wane.

Keywords: Humanism, Urban Spaces, Meja Mwangi, Novels

Introduction

Humanism is concerned with the dignity of persons regardless of country, colour, history and tradition (Egbunu, 2014). Hence, despite its global value, humanism is also culturally oriented. Subsequently, reveals that humanism is a global concept that applies to a particular set of people that may be seen as Africans, Europeans, Americans, or Asians (Kanu, 2017). It is therefore along this line and spirit that the idea of "types of humanisms" emerge such as African humanism, Asian humanism, and Western humanism, among others. Based on this perspective, "African humanism" is, therefore, construed from an African point of view as 'a humanism' of the African people since Africa is part of the globe where humanism is practised. As such, "African humanism" is an adaptation of humanism to the concrete situation of the African people. This humanism attempts to identify values and life practices typical of the African people that distinguish them from other people of different regions of the world. Africans are those people who belong to the geographical entity within the confines of the African continent; those people of various racial groups that inhabit the continent, whether they are of black races, black Saharan, or Negroes (Egbunu, 2014).

African humanism is society-oriented and culturally equated with the communal values and traditions of an African village or ethnic group. This kind of humanism is founded on maxims and social principles. For instance, Samkange (1980) holds that African humanism is based on three maxims. First, to be human is to affirm the humanity of others by establishing respectful human relationships with them. Secondly, when an

individual is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life first. Finally, leaders owe their status, including all powers associated with leadership to the will of the people under them. It is in this respect that Tutu (1999) posits that a person with Ubuntu – African humanism – is open to others, affirms others and does not feel threatened that others are able and good. He further opines that African humanism is the essence of being human, meaning that an individual cannot live in isolation.

This paper is based on the premise that issues of humanism have been captured in Kenyan literature. The early generation Kenyan writers such as Jomo Kenyatta, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, among others that wrote before and immediately after independence still narrated the political, socio-economic and cultural aspects of their nations (Bardolph, 1984). Furthermore, these authors advocated for nationalism, decolonization and equality among nationals in order to discourage societal stratification, thereby encouraging the values of African humanism among individuals. Schwerdt (1994) also notes that Ngugi is among African writers who have insisted that the impact of colonialism and capitalism still linger in the African communities. These political, socio-economic and cultural forces have continued to crumble communal values of African humanism that would have otherwise helped build a cohesive and healthy society. The issues of African cultural values, particularly communalism, are also foregrounded in Ngugi's works because he has a strong dislike for economic systems founded on individual possession of communal resources such as land. Besides, Schwerdt observes that Ngugi detests a neo-colonialist regime since such an organization denies individuals communal life and healthy human relationships.

It is through literary works that artists such as Ngugi unravel the function of literature as being the articulation of the human experience of individuals in an environment. It is also argued that good literature articulates values like human rights that are embodied in African humanism (Kula, 2016). Basing on this observation, it can be argued that genres of literature such as popular fiction have the potential of depicting postcolonial issues such as class divisions, poverty, underemployment, unemployment, crime, prostitution, to mention but a few. These are some of the thematic concerns foregrounded in the works of the second-generation writers, particularly Kenyan popular fiction artists such as David Mailu, Charles Mungia, Wahome Mutahi, and Meja Mwangi. Arguably, their works tend to deviate from "serious" works that portray themes such as colonialism, culture, land, among others (Barber, 1987). It has been posited that Mwangi's popular fiction depicts problems such as landscapes of stinking back alleys, inhuman dwellings and the severe social problems that accompany them (Kurtz, 1998). Presumably, such societal challenges are often engendered by socio-political and economic situations in a capitalist society such as Kenya. Eventually, this negatively influences the values of African humanism in a social setup.

The trilogy by Mwangi, in this respect, deals with the gap between the rich and poor, traditional versus modern values, unemployment, urbanization, prostitution, crime and violence that have negatively influenced individuals' lives. The setting of the trilogy - *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road* and *The Cockroach Dance* voices the problems, pain of neo-colonial Kenya and Africa as a whole as portrayed by the characters in his art. Lukacs (1971) also posits that great writers are those that depict typical characters and their struggle for self-realization without imposing any political orientation. Additionally, Mwangi's other works such as children's literature, drama, poetry and short stories have also grounded him on the literary scene. These works particularly the trilogy delineate societal ills earlier mentioned in the study, thereby contradicting the principles of African humanism that are key in exalting human dignity, self-worthiness and respect. It is no wonder that critics such as Kurtz (1998) and Barber (1987) celebrate popular fiction, particularly novels authored by Mwangi. This is because they hold that Mwangi articulates vital societal issues such as poverty and inequality that impact the lives of majority nationals in postcolonial Kenya.

This portrayal of societal challenges unravels the unfair treatment of the masses, yet they are the majority in a community. These impoverished persons expose high poverty levels due to the ever-increasing imbalanced allocation of profitable resources. Focusing on this scenario, Marxists hold that with the unequal distribution of economic resources, there is bourgeoisie at the top, middle-level class of workers and those of the bottom - the lumpen proletariat who live in slums (Habib, 2005). Inevitably, this social disorder contravenes the African humanism aspects such as communalism, the sacredness of human life and healthy human relationships in a given African community (Kanu, 2017).

The widening gap between the poor and the rich is sharply demonstrated by disgruntled societal members through instances of violence, crime, forceful robbery and juvenile delinquency as narrated in popular fiction like Mwangi's trilogy (Odhiambo, 2007). Moreover, this cruelty undermines the principles of African humanism that enhance solidarity, sharing and persons' welfare. Accordingly, literary artists tend to recreate narratives that suggest the extent to which privatization of public wealth and unfair sharing of available resources increase the moral decay of individuals in an environment exemplified by the Kenyan nation. Thus, the role of African humanism in a neo-colonial society is arguable since authors, particularly popular fiction writers, foreground a social milieu that is bedevilled by woes of post colonialism like exploitation and inequality (Kehinde, 2005). For instance, it is observed that popular novelists such as Mwangi depict characters prone to human rights abuse, particularly those in *Kill Me Quick*, that are denied rights to shelter, food and clothing (Kula, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Humanism is a conscious awareness and reciprocal actions of being humane. An individual's efforts to be humane and to realize fully their own humanity is affected by the forces within and outside him or her. One of the roles of literature is to toy with this question of humanism, to describe its condition and how individuals strive to realize and exercise their humanity. Within the past African social setup, emphasis was placed on oneness, sharing, respect and human dignity all in the spirit of African Humanism. This ensured the upholding of harmonious relationships among Africans as reflected in mainstream African literature. However, because of social changes, human relationships have also changed, particularly in a socially stratified contemporary society.

Methodology

This study adopted an analytical research design in the process of collection, classification, comparison and analysis of the relevant literary data. The study population comprised Kenyan novels authored by Meja Mwangi. He has published forty-six novels. These texts deal with different thematic concerns but are largely concerned with the underprivileged and privileged individuals in society. Mwangi's trilogy formed the primary source for data analysis for the current study. This study adopted purposive sampling technique to locate both the writer and his relevant novels for study. The study sampled Mwangi's urban trilogy, *Kill Me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) due to their chronicling of urban-based issues such as crime, prostitution, class divisions, among others that threaten African humanism. The primary source of data for this study was the trilogy. Secondary data was obtained from relevant journal articles, books, dissertations, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. The data collected for the study was examined by utilizing qualitative content analysis. The study used the latent content as expressed through examination of the mode of characterization, thematic concerns, and the writer's narrative techniques endeavour to communicate societal predicament, in line with the portrayal of African humanism.

Results and Discussion

Humanism in the Urban Space

The urban space studied in the trilogy of Meja Mwangi is within the city of Nairobi. Myers (2010) posits that African postcolonial cities are pervaded by prevailing joblessness, an overwhelming increase of poverty and a widening gap between the poor and the rich. Moreover, this urban locale is marked by slums that house over fifty percent of Nairobi's total population as the number of city dwellers keeps on increasing, leading to congestion (Odero, Natsume & Wakayama, 2009). These scholars hold that slums are a major problem facing urbanization in contemporary developing countries such as Kenya. For instance, Nairobi became Kenya's capital city in 1950, but after independence in 1963 due to rural-urban migration, many youth have continued to migrate to Nairobi creating congestion in the city thereby causing the emergence of slums. Consequently, Nairobi outgrew its capacity for housing facilities, prompting the government to establish temporal residences, the shacks on the city outskirts to combat the situation. The slum towns have outgrown with the largest being Kibera and Mathare. The socio-economic challenges faced by the slum dwellers have inspired writers such as Meja Mwangi hence the rise of 'urban literature.' This literature centres on Nairobi slums as one of the major issues (Odero *et al.*, 2009).

It is also noted that African cities represent major challenges as well as opportunities (Myers, 2010). Myers posits that these cities suffer from the influence of former European colonialism elements of segregation and

social stratification. He moreover says that rural-to-urban migration was fuelled by the pull of perception rather than actual opportunity and by the push factors of rural landlessness, herdlessness, involution, poverty and lack of employment. He reiterates that the aspects of poverty, inequality and injustice are common in African cities.

A close reading of *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road* and *The Cockroach Dance* unravel instances and encounters with characters entangled in twists of fate in an urban locale. This is revealed through their actions, utterances and behaviour. It is also evident that the trilogy, particularly *Kill Me Quick* chronicles both rural and urban environments, whereas the other two centre on an urban locale. However, many issues have been raised in these novels about the urban space with its dislocation of individuals' humane dispositions as their moral and cultural values gradually wane.

From a Marxist point of view, persons in capitalist societies face alienation and self-fragmentation because of oppressive and exploitative capitalistic divisions of labour (Lukács, 1971; Eagleton, 2013). For these Marxists, this mistreatment of the underprivileged masses is a pressing challenge that inhibits progress in any given community. For instance, Lukács asserts that alienation and fragmentation of persons lead to reification that results in 'individual estrangement due to the deprivation of humanity. The events in the novels reveal a Kenyan nation that is already stratified into classes of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' Class struggle and oppression are evidently societal forces that cripple post-independent Kenya and Africa at large, depicting them as unhealthy societies for persons' dwelling. This is because the oppressor, through possession of power and material goods, manipulates the powerless and impoverished masses that are unable to revolt against these injustices. Moreover, Kehinde (2004) argues that Mwangi still writes novels that chronicle neo-colonial social injustice in all its forms and that he delineates the Kenyan masses who are wallowing in societal issues such as injustices, hunger, oppression, exploitation and harrowing poverty. He further observes that social classes and rampant scarcity of personal integrity and dignity characterize today's Kenya. Vices such as class struggle have replaced the previous peaceful existence of individuals in society. In *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi reveals pragmatic details about ordinary life, particularly humanistic issues like class and inequality among individuals.

For one to be considered 'humane' from an African standpoint, one has to exhibit concern for others' welfare, uphold respect and dignity for oneself and others in a social environment. Hence, this promotes the well-being of each person in a social environment. When Meja first comes to Nairobi city, the unfriendly city residents immediately strike him. None of them pays attention to the other, even to Meja who is new in the place. The narrator pictorially captures this change of lifestyle thus:

The evening passed slowly and Meja sat quietly wondering about what his friend had told him. Life was to be lived as it came. So he sat and pondered over his friend's words and slowly relaxed. Maina explained to him all about the life in the city, its laws and bye-laws, its corruption, and, whenever he came across any, its good points. He told Meja that in the city everybody minded his own business and none noticed the other. Not as a fellow human being anyway. Everybody had his part to play in the game of life and everybody did just that (Mwangi, 1973, p. 9).

The city dwellers that Maina and Meja meet are alienated and engrossed in their affairs, unconcerned about the welfare of other persons around them. This encounter unravels a gap between members of the city, especially the disparity between the poor and the rich in contemporary Kenya. It is a society portrayed as indifferent, lifeless and individualistic. Arguably, this city is contrasted with the African rural home, and society that the duo comes from that cherishes human dignity, sharing, concern, and one that extols oneness. This is because these youth are able to make a difference between the two locales as disclosed in this excerpt. In addition, they can make a comparison of the 'haves' – those that do not notice others as fellow human beings who are in need, and the 'have-nots' – the ones who starve and are dressed in rags that are exemplified by the protagonists, Meja and Maina. This, therefore, shows how modernity has negatively influenced the individuals of the Kenyan urban centres whereby the poor continue to languish in dehumanizing conditions while the rich live comfortably.

It is humane to be concerned about those people that a member of society daily encounters and interacts with, as embodied in “I am because we are,” an African gesture of being humane to others in society. However, it is surprising for Meja to encounter unfeeling human beings who cannot greet or pay attention to others, yet it is a norm that Africans should greet one another (Mbiti, 1991). This is because greetings are an expression of togetherness, appreciation, and familiarity particularly among the people in a social setup.

The rural environment, in this case, signifies satisfaction, filial love and neighbourly humane feelings whereas artificiality, eroticism, marginalization, dreadful individualism, loss of pristine being, and the imitation of western values mark the city life. This is characteristic of a modern city like Nairobi that portrays alienation resulting from loss of identity through imitation of alien cultures. Meja’s encounter with the city dwellers is intentionally used by Mwangi to depict a contemporary Kenya, which is already capitalistic, insensitive and individualistic. Hence, the city dwellers’ focus is individualistic and drawn to self-fulfilment, while unintentionally they negate human values of concern, togetherness and sharing. Illustratively, those who pass by Meja like the ragged beggars, those engrossed in their daily problems, and the smart potbellied ones, hardly recognize him. This is aptly summarised by Kehinde (2004) who posits that Mwangi’s depiction of this crude individualism among persons unravels a stratified community that silently whispers, ‘mind your own business,’ which disputes interdependence and communalism. In this regard, Mwangi portrays a society that has lost its humane touch towards the poor and the less fortunate as represented by Meja and Maina who are lacking basic needs like food, shelter and clothing in the urban centres.

The fictionalized society in *Kill Me Quick*, which is prototypical of contemporary Kenya, portrays the disillusioned, the oppressed, the poor and less privileged persons represented by the protagonists Meja and Maina. Focusing briefly on the past Kenyan society immediately after independence, most Kenyans, especially the youth moved to centres like Nairobi city to seek employment, a trend that is even witnessed today (Odhiambo, 2008). Unfortunately, the already stratified and discriminative contemporary society offers none or few job opportunities. Evidently, in the novel, Mwangi focuses on the protagonist, Maina who narrates to his colleague, Meja, about his predicament of frustration, alienation and abject poverty. This condition has eaten up his personality, rendered him dehumanized, hence his current animalized state that the author vividly captures:

The cakes were no longer cakes but fragments of rock and the chocolates looked like discarded shoe polish. ‘Let’s eat,’ Maina said and dived into the food. Meja was a fraction of a moment slower in responding, but soon they were munching and chewing hungrily. And between mouthfuls of food, they talked. Maina did most of the talking and Meja listened as patiently as ever. ‘I came here raw and proud the way you are,’ Maina said to Meja scraping away the rotten side of an orange. ‘I thought I would get a job and earn six-seven hundred shillings a month. Then I would get a house, a radio, good clothes and food.’ He paused (Mwangi, 1973, p.1).

This, indeed, reveals the starvation that compels Maina and Meja to painfully feed on rotten food. The utterance by Maina that he came to the city raw and proud, unravels how harsh and oppressive city living conditions are in present Kenya. Hence, these inhumane urban living conditions render these victims downtrodden and degraded. Normally, persons are innately humane when they are nurtured well within a family and society (Mbiti, 1991). Consequently, such well-rounded youth like Maina and Meja, naturally radiate human values of compassion, generosity, and a sense of humanity to others.

It is, therefore, astounding and contradicting when the writer presents the characters, Meja and Maina, feeding on decayed food. This begs the question as to why these characters resort to eating rotten food, yet there are other members of the society in the vicinity for example “those who have” who see the duo eating the stale food. Mwangi mirrors a contemporary Kenya that is characterized by diminished care, concern and sharing due to individuals’ strive for personal gains, which spring from egocentrism, competition and self-gratification. As a result, the society has become more materialistic and individualistic. Moreover, the prices of edible goods are high, which the poor masses like Meja and Maina cannot afford. The rich owners of shops and supermarkets would rather wait and have their goods expire and consequently dispose of than give to the needy-poor represented by Maina and Meja.

As revealed in the text, these protagonists are innocent youth who have performed well at school and seek better jobs that would earn them a decent life. For instance, Maina has an academic certificate of division two and Meja division one-school certificate. These youths suffer from starvation and alienation, which compel them to feed on decayed food and wear unsightly clothing. This is a reflection of a mean, selfish, harsh and individualistic environment, where each person minds their interest. This then contravenes the African societal call for sharing, equality and compassion, which enhance cohesion and centralization of a healthy community (Tutu, 1999). The plight of Meja and Maina brings to the fore a society that is cruel, divisive, and capitalistic. Hence, this has contributed to loss of dignity and integrity of its members as portrayed by the two protagonists that have become insensitive to their health and hygiene. Mwangi shows the reader social class tendencies in the Kenyan society depicted in the novel, where individuals do not feel at home, but behave strangely and animal-like to each other. Indeed, this is Mwangi's unique and natural way of depicting his society without suggesting how to change the situation.

Meja and Maina live in misery, disillusionment, and isolation and in abject poverty, a condition that oppresses them more and more. Their efforts to get decent-paying jobs are thwarted. Their lives deteriorate as they undergo traumatizing experiences of personal deprivation and dejection in a society of a few privileged elite individuals. This misery strikes the reader especially when the writer reveals how the brightly schooled young men opt to go to the suburbs of the city to get jobs: "It was during this season when human and fly population was rising that Maina started having brainwaves. With the increase in the competition, this was inevitable. He conferred with his companion... agreed to go... suburbs of the city" (Mwangi, 1973, p. 11).

The gap between the rich and poor is exposed, as the rich women ridicule these boys due to their unsightly impoverished state, "the boys learned one thing...everybody tried to cheat you, from the ragged scrap metal buyer to barrel woman for whom you chopped wood" (Mwangi, 1973, p. 11). This is a pathetic and hopeless situation for both Meja and Maina, who have hugely been demoralized and animalized, portrayed as feeding on food that attracts flies. They are impoverished and lack social support since they are unemployed, given that in a capitalist nation like Kenya, scarce resources are not fully utilized, consequently leading to the masses' depression due to unemployment. As asserted earlier, Meja and Maina encounter disrespect and contempt from fellow humans, a revelation that selfishness and individualism have encroached on the current society. Inevitably, these vices have led to division among members of society. This unravels how a neo-colonial society is characterized into classes of the 'haves' and 'have-nots. This is a disclosure of how the Kenyans have become individualistic hence, a revelation that humanness no longer helps cement people's mutual relations.

The isolation, disillusionment and torture that Meja and Maina are exposed to in Nairobi city show an urban society whose dwellers lack the warmth, and feelings of belonging. This is because a healthy and humane society cherishes the African humanism spirit that is interwoven with a spirit of togetherness and communalism. Accordingly, this humane attitude helps build a cohesive community that is anchored on authentic love, care and concern for its members. On the contrary, Mwangi portrays a sick contemporary Kenyan environment marred by self-centeredness. In this case, this involves; first, the rich people who have but do not share and second, the majority poor represented by the two victims, Meja and Maina whose appearance is unsightly. Indeed, this shows that selfishness has taken a toll since no one has shown concern by providing them with food, clothing, or shelter. Ticha notes that Kurtz (2005) too upholds the assertion by Calder (1984) that *Kill Me Quick* is characterized by hunger, homelessness, and desperation of Maina and Meja. These critics opine that these youth are the 'Mwangian men' seen bright, academically successful persons whose failure to get employment leads to alienation, frustration and resignation. The exposure to oppressive living conditions gradually undermines their former humane status. Indeed, the writer vividly focuses on this:

...Maina was dressed in Khaki shorts, now tattered and anything but khaki, in colour, and his feet were bare and horny, the nails of the toes standing out at angles (Mwangi, 1973, p. 4).

This is Mwangi's portrayal of modern Kenya pervaded by the excruciating poverty of the masses. In contrast, the potbellied and wealthy ones live in fortified suburbs, while the poor represented by Meja and

Maina live in shanty-demonizing places. This is a depiction of a current Kenyan society that has lost grip of her persons' welfare, a state that has led to inequality, social stratification, pain and suffering of individuals.

In a society that cherishes humanness, an individual should not lose their humanity. According to African humanism spirit and values, members of society should not lose their dignity since humanness is essential for healthy relationships (Oraegbunam, 2012). Maina is dehumanized and does not care how he ought to dress, and that is why he tells Meja, "Those clothes could fetch you a few shillings...take good care of them. You might need the money," Maina nods, feeling raw (p. 4). It is evident that the protagonists' personality has deteriorated, and theirs is a struggle to survive, not to dress well. Otherwise, this is an indication that this is the beginning of their journey to doom and loss of their humanity as they later become involved in crime and alienated from their homes. Meja has just come to Nairobi city, unaware of the hostility and unfriendliness that engulfs the dwellers. Thus, it is assumed that Maina's humane disposition has shrunk, hence the caution he gives Meja to tread carefully in an environment that is individualistic and selfish. Meja is innocent at this time, while Maina who came earlier to this unfamiliar society is already frustrated. For Maina, dressing well is of no significance since the present community has failed to notice their potentials (academic qualifications). This is a disclosure of a contemporary Kenyan environment that is portrayed as housing persons that are encumbered with a fading sense of humanity, as is fictionalized in the novel, *Kill Me Quick*.

Usually, a normal person sleeps in a house, respects their humanity by living freely, and is not worried about police finding them in crime. On the contrary, Maina and Meja constantly fear the police and live a life of mongrels as revealed by the narrator:

'So,' Maina went on, 'all my friends became thieves and robbers. I would have done the same too but I was too cowardly to break into houses at night. I had not done much practice in running at school and could never trust my speed for getting away with purse snatching. So my friends went into the main streets and snatched purses and they are almost all of them in prison now, for one reason or another. Me, I turned into the backstreets and thrived. There isn't much competition for existence here, except with the mongrels and mongrels do not know how to open closed doors. And the food is not all that bad if you allow for the smell, and such minor things (Mwangi, 1973, p. 2).

This is a revelation of an absurd situation in the novel, *Kill Me Quick* that Mwangi presents before the reader to depict the inhumane conditions of most city inhabitants. Initially, Maina and Meja are portrayed as being humane and innately good-natured, but the state of being jobless, and lacking basic needs, gradually contribute to their dehumanization. This episode centres on what has negatively befallen Maina, and his friends (the downtrodden and impoverished). This scene echoes a society that is unconcerned, silent to the social problems that have encroached, and disrupted the humane disposition of its members. Hence, this contrasts the values of sharing, love and concern that reigned in the recent African society before the colonization by the Europeans (Fanon, 1961; Bhabha, 2013). For instance, Maina's personality has worsened, and his human feelings are distorted since he lives like an animal, the mongrels that he competes with for the decayed food from the rubbish bin, as narrated in the above excerpt. On the contrary, and strangely, others in the protagonists' new environment are presumably rich and whom Maina's friends steal from as revealed, 'so my friends went into the Main Street and snatched purses.' Indeed, this is a revelation of the decline of moral values in the individuals that have lost their humane endowment. In addition, Khoza (2006) postulates that:

An African is not a rugged individual but a person living within a community, and in a hostile environment, it is only through such community that hunger, isolation, deprivation, poverty and any emerging challenges can be survived because of the community's brotherly and sisterly concerns, cooperation, care and sharing (p.6).

Consequently, in a society that fails to embrace mutual relationships based on the African humanism spirit, there is a likelihood that this environment houses robbers, pickpockets, and criminals as mirrored in *Kill Me Quick*. This is due to a revelation of group stratification, inequality and disillusionment. Furthermore, Mwangi's fiction connotes pain and suffering as portrayed by Maina and Meja. Symbolically, these youth

represent most Kenyan masses today that lack basic needs like food and shelter. It is the resultant dissatisfaction and demonization of persons that lead to the loss of their human dignity. Thus, it is evident that vices such as crude individualism and classism have crept into contemporary Kenya, eroding mutual and healthy human relationships. It is no wonder that Kurtz (1993) observes that Mwangi's novels portray individuals who are dehumanized, whose humane dispositions are thwarted and who represent the disillusioned persons in contemporary Kenya.

The two job seekers, Meja and Maina are desperate and resigned as they live in the backstreets. It is innate for a man to have the urge of raising a family. On the contrary, the two youths develop a negative attitude towards marriage as they see it as a burden because of their demeaned status as brought to the reader's attention by the writer: 'a woman wanted to be loved, yes. But she also wanted some more. She wanted a husband, a home, children, happiness and security. Apart from love, Maina has nothing else to offer (Mwangi, 1973, p. 88). This is a situation of suppression of innate desires for Maina as well as Meja since from an African point of view, a man is respected and his dignity vindicated in society by the kind of family one raise. For these victims, societal forces over which they have no control ruin their good-natured selves. Accordingly, this is an insight into how contemporary Kenya is stratified into classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat who lead contrasting lifestyles. In this circumstance, Meja and Maina whose hope for comfortable and improved living standards has abruptly been doomed, represent the masses that wallow in misery whereas the minority few enjoy privileged positions.

After a fruitless search for reasonable work as per their academic qualifications, Maina with first division and Meja second division certificates, the personality of both protagonists deteriorates. Subsequently, they lose hope, voice, and power to express their disillusionment and even the stamina to persevere living in such frustration. While the novel begins with both Maina and Meja possessing pleasant personality traits and qualities, in the process of their interactions in the new environment, they encounter formidable poverty, passionless and callous individuals leaving them hopeless. The cold and individualistic reception by urban dwellers has led Maina and Meja to psychological, emotional and moral destabilization. Furthermore, the crime, robbery and mugging they engage in for survival, render them dehumanized individuals.

Their character continues to deteriorate and degenerate as they evade crime by limiting their stay to the backstreet and the white manager's farm. However, the excruciating hunger and starvation the exploitative farm manager exerts on Meja and Maina throws them into risky ventures. Firstly, their engagement in crime starts when they start stealing carrots and cakes from the white settler's residence as narrated by the author: 'Carrots boys,' a voice boomed behind them. They shot to their feet at the unmistakable sound. 'Conspiring to steal my carrots at night is punishable by dismissal,' he rumbled (Mwangi, 1973, p. 28). As a result, the white manager dismisses them from the farm, a situation that leads to the eventual ruin of Maina and Meja. Henceforth, their lives are gradually ruined. Maina meets Razor, the criminal gang leader who further seduces Maina into their gang. From this time on, Maina's humane disposition worsens as he is indoctrinated into a hard-core criminal as the narrator reports:

Get him, the Sweeper growled, shoving Maina after the man. If he gets lost, you are done for.' Maina stumbled after a few steps after the blue suit and the gravel under his feet complained. He hesitated for a moment...He hit the hedge full, force, a force that landed him on the other side much bruised and torn. He was still clinging to the coat and picking himself up he headed deep into the bush. Sweeper and professor were already waiting for him there.... Though gasping for breath and trying to focus his mind on what he had just accomplished, Maina felt his friends patting him on the back and congratulating him enthusiastically. But his mind was still spinning, spinning in fear, fear of policemen, running crowds and, - and the Razor's cold, heart-chilling blade (Mwangi, 1973, p. 74-75).

Paradoxically, the naive and innocent Maina the reader encounters at the beginning of the novel has turned out to be a dangerous mugger. His human nature has diminished since he mercilessly robs his fellow human beings, a behaviour that portrays him as a villain, delinquent and lawbreaker. This is a disclosure of how innocent persons have lost their humanity in the current capitalistic Kenyan nation due to the criminal activities they involve themselves in for survival's sake.

Moreover, this is why Kenyan urban places such as Nairobi city and other major towns of the country are filled with street urchins and destitute. Indeed, Odhiambo (2007, p. 95) argues that the setting of Kenyan popular fiction reflects crime and violence in the towns and cities of Kenya, which house the poor, destitute, jobless masses and the like. Consequently, this has given birth to a modern Kenyan community that is at loggerheads with the maintenance of a healthy society, where mutual and healthy human relationships thrive. In the recent past, the values of humanness were firmly held within a community (Mbiti, 1991). This presumably then empowered persons with virtues of sharing, love and concern for others, hence, no instances of crime and individual classification could be witnessed.

At the beginning of *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi utilizes a poem that vividly captures the frustration, pain and suffering of the two characters, Meja and Maina. They have become rebellious and only want to rise against a capitalistic-urban society that has failed to recognize their worth by ignoring their academic qualifications and potentials. Theirs is a life characterized by doom, despair and a feeling of hopelessness that spring from the presence of city dwellers that are indifferent and insensitive to the plight of the needy. Only a few privileged individuals manage to live comfortably. The vehicles they drive, ownership of overstuffed supermarkets and the huge farms they own, evidence this. This is paralleled with the dirty backstreets and shanty slums for the doomed, vulnerable, starving and the impoverished like Meja and Maina. The deplorable situation that has dragged the disadvantaged masses to surrender to death and a wish to vanish from such deprivation as passionately recited in the introductory poem:

*Days run out for me,
Life goes from bad to worse,
Very soon, very much soon,
Time will lead me to the end.
Very well. So be it.
But one thing I beg of you
If the sun must set for me
If all must come to an end
If you be rid of me
The way you have done with all my friends
If you must kill me
Do so fast (Mwangi, 1973, p.1)*

This condition actually has necessitated a resignation to the suffering and alienation of the characters. They prefer death to living in an environment that lacks a sense of humanity. Certainly, this portrays contemporary Kenya that is marked by inequality and uneven distribution of resources, a revelation of a societal negation of what Mbiti (1991) asserts:

...an individual owes his/her existence to other people and that the person is part of the whole, that is a society...whatever happens to the individual, happens to the whole group, and happens to an individual...the individual can only say, ' I am because we are and since we are there I am (Mbiti, 1991, p. 108).

It is unfortunate that the society in which Meja and Maina live in is void of African cultural values. There is a lack of concern and love towards others as portrayed by the ill-treatment accorded to the intellectually bright youths. It is revealed that crude individualism exists in the city, which is marred by indifference, groupings, selfishness, and harassment that is meted on them in offices when seeking jobs. Hence, Meja and Maina opt to live as savages since they cannot afford decent lives, a wish for death ensues as communicated in this poem. This forces them to join the poor masses in the urban centre, a contemporary society that is already stratified.

In *Going Down River Road*, Mwangi focuses on a social environment whose inhabitants are low-income earners, evidenced by a combination of diverse activities and manner of production for their living. The writer also centres on a rich landlord whose rental building these dwellers occupy, which reveals that the rental rooms are congested since Ben is disturbed by a neighbour's – Max's roaring radiogram next door. The narrator vividly describes the varied occupations of these residents in the fiction world of Mwangi:

There were all sorts of people in the neighbourhood. There was a childless old woman who lived on hawking green vegetable matter. There were two refuse collectors, a Grogan Road Mechanic who swore he was never a thief and three retired whores who only did the occasional special duty with the landlord or somebody else. There were two office clerks and their messengers' families. There were the city council policemen and the unlicensed roadside cobbler. Two neighbours who spent the days racing one another round town in the course of their duties before coming home to be good neighbours for the night. Then there were Max and his bugs in the room next door (Mwangi, 1976, p. 3).

This, in fact, is a delineation of impoverished, desperate, abandoned and unhappy tenants in Nairobi city as evinced in this excerpt. The gap between the poor residents and the aristocrat, the property owner is exhibited, suggesting the presence of an exploitative wealthy proprietor. The residents of the rental house seem to be struggling to fend for themselves since Marx and his bugs are involved in crime. This also demonstrates the writer's disclosure of a society that is stratified into classes of individuals, in this case, the poor jobless masses. They are a disenchanting lot and disconnected from each other, a portrayal of a state of gloom and doom for these characters that are not in touch with each other. Humanely, persons are supposed to interact and not to exist as classes. This is a contradiction of the African philosophy's spirit built on the notion of mutual human relations, meaning that we all depend on one another for our wellbeing (Mbiti, 1991). Ideally, the abject poverty has dragged these individuals into this withdrawn condition of absurdity. Interaction among persons is mandatory for connectivity and shared experience. The fact that Mwangi portrays characters existing as groups shows a society of declining mutual respect, concern and compassion for each other. These individuals have been pushed to the periphery due to the inevitable contemporary capitalist system, which is classist-oriented. Indeed, this is a revelation of a contemporary Kenya that is faced with communal challenges that have squeezed out humanness from persons.

In *Going Down River Road*, the protagonist, Ben is ceaselessly drunk and associated with drinking places that include Karara Centre, Capricorn, Tree Bottoms and *Sukuma Wiki* – the labourer's specialist. Heavy drinking of unhygienic drinks that include illegally brewed and often poisonous liquor shows his dehumanized nature. By drinking, though escapist, Ben hopes to bury the pains and suffering, which spring from his impoverished situation. For instance, at *Karara Centre*, Ben's regular presence is disclosed:

Ben lets his eyes rove the dimly lit stuffy place. Everyone in sight drinks *karara*, a homemade brew that looks like muddy water, tastes like sisal juice and is as powerful as gasoline. The 'Beer Menu' on the wall announces the price as eighty cents, which is one-third of the price of pilsner and a quarter the price of any of the best Scotch whisky...they are simply a lot of happy, drunk people. In the bar, few can afford ties or suits, and no one pretends to be decently drunk, they shout, froth at the mouth and fight before crawling home to bed. Few manage to walk out of here. They just slide out into the rubbish strewn street and somehow get home safely to return the following day for more (Mwangi, 1976, p. 66).

Normally, in an African setting, taking beer used to be is a social activity that provided relaxation and chance for individuals to establish familiarity with one another. This, in fact, would be a time to realize the societal spirit of sharing. On the contrary, in this episode, drinking alcohol seems to be a way of helping these casual workers not to think of the dehumanizing working conditions. This is a position of demoralization for Ben since he joins the masses in the drinking 'drama.' He represents some of the modern Kenyan individuals who unfairly lose their jobs and submerge their frustration in alcoholism or prostitution. In the novel, Mwangi reveals that formerly Ben was a soldier, moreover, a lieutenant as revealed in this conversation:

'I had him kicked out of the army.' 'What army?' 'Soldiers.' Ocholla's face clouds with respect and awe. 'You are a soldier?' Ben replied, 'An officer. A first lieutenant' (Mwangi, 1976, p. 48).

This situation reveals the initial personality status of Ben and Onesmus, a fellow military officer. They both suffer due to dismissal from the army. Consequently, they are rendered jobless, a situation that is stressful and humiliating for both characters. Ocholla is shocked to realize how cruel and uncaring some employers

contribute to the loss of human dignity exemplified by Ben. Thus, this negates the spirit of being considerate to others as fellow human beings. Thus, being an army lieutenant and getting cashiered for involvement in aiding robbers with firearms to aid bank robbery, leads to Ben's frustration and hopelessness. From this dialogue, Ocholla is amazed when he gets to know how sophisticated Ben's life had been as a soldier, and fails to fathom the dehumanizing circumstances that have led to the now 'disfigured and impoverished Ben.'

In *Going Down River Road*, the character Mbugua is portrayed as a ruthless and inhumane individual who has no respect for other persons' property. When he meets Ben, his unfeeling and arrogant human nature is exposed as revealed:

'When we want money, me and the boys, we just go out and get it.' He added after a pause: 'We just fetch it in. From where it is. 'Wherever it is.' Ben's face clouded. The other noticed his uneasiness. 'That's it,' he shrugged. 'We just...eh, go collect. 'Just like that?' Just like that!' 'Banks?' Mbugua's mind wrestled with inhibitions. He shrugged. 'Wherever.' Ben took a long drink, his cool calculating eyes watching, figuring, wondering. When he spoke, it was with a sure, hard voice. 'In other words you are robbers.' Mbugua blew out thick black tobacco smoke, spoke without looking at him. 'That is a matter of difference in terminology.' 'And you want my help?' That is the main point' he nodded. Ben shook his head. 'I am sorry, but I am not that way out yet (Mwangi, 1976, pp. 54-55).

This reveals Mbugua and the boys' devised ways of retaliating against the rich. Mbugua and his gang rob institutions like banks and this is why Ben, while in the army, illegally assisted them with stealing a mortar to use in a bank robbery after they had lured him into it, ignorant of their being muggers. From this episode, Ben is assumedly innocent in the sense that he has not attempted to involve himself in crime given the fact that he is astounded to discover that Mbugua is a mugger and robber. This unravels the inequality between the poor and rich. Mbugua indicates that he simply robs the banks as a show of selfishness and crude individualism that overshadows the African cultural values that focus on respect for human life, among others. However, according to Marxists, this excerpt demonstrates a revolt by the poor against the rich as they forcibly rob banks. Evidently, in this storyline, Mbugua is not alone in this errand of robbery, but has a gang that he is enticing Ben to join. Being ruthless and inhumane as shown by what he indulges in, Mbugua coaxes Ben to follow suit but Ben, being innately caring and humane, declines the persuasion. Arguably, the negotiation between Mbugua and Ben as brought out in this episode truly communicates how the current society hosts persons who have lost sense of the values of humanness. Indeed, this is a portrayal of persons who are at war with the values of African traditional society that also centre on respect for other people's property.

Furthermore, in this storyline, Mbugua demonstrates his disrespect for other individuals' possessions (money), which he claims to rob forcibly from whoever when he wants it. The urge to snatch callously other individuals' belongings goes against the dictates of African humanism. This is because it is assumed that the whole world exists for the sake of humankind (Khoza, 2006). In addition, Africans search for the usefulness of the universe concerning humanity, which centres on what the world can do for human persons (Mbiti, 1982). In *Going Down River Road*, Mwangi presents a picture that reflects a neo-colonial Kenyan society that is typically distorted by atrocities like mugging, pickpocketing, and robbery among other ills.

Arguably, *The Cockroach Dance* articulates the human experience of persons in Kenya sixteen years after independence. The text describes a modern Kenyan community in which the masses seem to be dehumanized. For instance, there are the tenants of Dacca House who wallow in poverty and disillusionment (Awitor, 2013). Additionally, Kurtz (1993) also insists that *The Cockroach Dance* has urban settings associated with urban problems such as overcrowding, joblessness and disillusionment, which has bred masses - the faceless ones, who manifest inhumane character traits as presented in this novel. Furthermore, *The Cockroach Dance* metaphorically presents the extent to which poverty has dehumanized the underclass in society. The novel acts as a weapon in awakening the current Kenyan society to humanely, and urgently respond to this upcoming agonizing monster of individual dehumanization.

Normally, all human beings feel comfortable when treated with respect and their dignity recognized. Unfortunately, the fictionalized Kenyan society in *The Cockroach Dance* pictures an environment of

disillusioned characters, a representation of persons in the current Kenyan community. The mechanic, famously nicknamed 'the Bathroom Man', is exposed as an individual impoverished to the extent of staying in the bathroom, as his name suggests. His wife and a mentally handicapped child all live in this bathroom. His stay in the bathroom portrays him as an extremely poor, demeaned, dehumanized individual. Through the Bathroom Man, Mwangi shows how urbanization, capitalism and ownership of monetary goods benefit only the rich like Tumbo Kubwa, whereas the poor such as the Bathroom man wallow in embarrassing and depriving poverty.

This portrayal of characters contradicts the notion of perceiving fellow human beings as humans, mutually and culturally connected in society. The importance of money cannot be ignored as it determines whether humans live a comfortable and dignified or an uncomfortable and undignified life of the sort the Bathroom Man is shown to experience. The Bathroom Man is dehumanized to an extent that he foregoes his dignity and space, in order to inhabit a shanty place as his home. It is generally arguable that a bathroom is meant for showering and not for habitation. Therefore, the study focuses on the Bathroom Man's portrayal as an individual who has lost sense of being humane. The narrator vividly paints this:

The bathroom, unlike the other rooms had no admirers, so, while everyone else was shoving and wrangling for the bigger rooms, the mechanic, his wife and child quietly crept down the yard and settled in the bathroom long before most tenants had set foot in the large rooms, the mechanic had already acquired a new personality., he had become the bathroom man. Only Dusman had paid any attention as the bathroom family moved in. He watched in amazement as man and wife crammed themselves into the cell-like room, first the reluctant sorry possessions, then their bodies and souls. Dusman sat for a long time by the window and stared mouth agape with suspense as the bathroom man forced their rickety bed into the room. He sat for close an hour as they twisted the bed this way and that and finally sawed off the legs to make it shorter (Mwangi, 1979, p. 56).

This is a disclosure of how the mechanic, who formerly lived in a ramshackle hovel, now prefers to live in a bathroom, which he finds more comfortable. It is unbelievable how dehumanizing an environment such as an urban-dwelling can be for the extremely poor and deprived members of society. This is evidenced by the Bathroom Man who is portrayed as a victim of dogged poverty leading to his state of hopelessness and animalization. His decision to move to an "unsightly bathroom" denies him human respect and the dignity that befits the other residents of Dacca House, like Dusman, who is critical of a 'bathroom' as a human living place. Hence, his lack of feelings and sensitivity to what the other individuals think of him depicts him as a sub-human, a state that degrades and animalizes him. Moreover, he has also influenced his wife and child to the extent that they have lost their dignity as human beings. This is a revelation of how poverty contributes to the debasement of a person in Kenya today (Awitor, 2013). Besides, in the opinion of Awitor, Dusman sees the Bathroom Man as an individual who has betrayed his masculinity, his very manhood by bringing his faithful wife and baby to live in a bathroom by the trashcans (p. 162). Moreover, Dusman, a protagonist in the novel contemptuously describes the Bathroom Man as 'a dark Bathroom Man like a slimy black African toad' (Mwangi, 1979, p. 66).

The property owner, Tumbo Kubwa, is a representation of the rich few in the fictionalized society of *The Cockroach Dance*. He is depicted as a character that is inhumane due to his ruthlessness, arrogance and exploitative nature as graphically presented by the narrator:

Tumbo Kubwa was one of the first Africans ever to open his eyes after the long slumber induced on the natives by colonialism. As soon as he realized that winds of change and fortune were flowing hard, he unfurled his creased sails and struck out into the future of property investment...He paid Kachra Samat in hard cash...That same day, Tumbo Kubwa moved in with a group of freelance carpenters, masons and plumbers picked off street corners and from low-class bars in town...They set to work partitioning the flat. The bigger rooms were partitioned with cardboards to make more rooms. By the time they had finished, Kachra Samat's connection doors were all nailed shut. Each room was a complete private entity with some sort of a window and door, and worth at least three hundred shillings a month (Mwangi, 1979, pp. 83-84).

In this extract, this rich proprietor is out to make maximum profit from this rental house, regardless of the dehumanizing conditions he is subjecting the tenants to. He is propelled by the level of social status and power that underlies his selfish and individualistic attitude towards these occupants. This then portrays him as a capitalist exploiter who demeans and degrades other fellow humans by soliciting high rent from the tenants. This is evidenced by Tumbo Kubwa's actions of reducing normal rooms into prison-like cells. His behaviour invalidates African humanism, a value system of survival, solidarity, compassion, and respect for human beings, and the significance of a person's dignity (Mbigi, 1997). Furthermore, it is revealed that the Bathroom man is a distant relative of Tumbo Kubwa, yet, he also expects him to pay house rent irrespective of living in a bathroom.

The protagonist, Tumbo Kubwa is an individual that is selfish, capitalistic and values money more than the lives of his tenants in Dacca House like the Bathroom Man, Sukuma Wiki and others. This portrays him as an individual who has lost touch with the essence of being humane to other individuals as his actions and drive are in total contrast to the contention of Khomba (2011) who emphasizes that African humanism entails the significance and value of a person in society. Tumbo Kubwa's oppression of the tenants of Dacca house like Bathroom Man presents Tumbo Kubwa as a bourgeoisie-capitalist, who is interested in making a maximum profit while minding less about the welfare of the 'have nots' (Eagleton, 2011). Additionally, the novel graphically illustrates the disruption of the traditional structures such as a family whose privacy and space formed/forms part of an individual's dignity (Kurtz, 1993). This shows that Tumbo Kubwa is a representative of the privileged class- 'the haves,' who suppresses and oppresses the masses as represented by the characters namely; Chupa na Debe, Sukuma Wiki and others.

The occupants of the Dacca house in *The Cockroach Dance* are typical of persons in the modern Kenyan community who display inhumane behaviour in a capitalist, classist social setup. These characters involve, Sukuma Wiki (a type of vegetable-kales), Chupa na Debe (bottles and can), Magendo (racketeer) and the faceless ones (those whom very little is known about). These characters have been baptized with 'Kiswahili' names that allude to the nature of business they carry out to fend for themselves. The activities they are engaged in for their livelihood earn them insufficient income for their sustenance. These characters have resigned themselves to this lifestyle because as revealed, they no longer resist the demonizing human living environment that sends chilling sensations to the reader of this text whenever they are mentioned as disclosed by the narrator:

Chupa na Debe was busy sorting out the week's loot... He was a willowy old man. At least with sixty years old...He had every conceivable bottle in his collection: spirit bottles, wine bottles, cooking oil bottles, fruit juice bottles the whole lot. Apart from his beddings at the tinsmith kit...his room contained an incredible amount of rubbish and old bottles...his bed was also his workshop. The room was like a miniature private garbage dump, and smelt somewhere between a clinic, a garage, a beer hall and real garbage dump (Mwangi, 1979, p. 214).

In a stratified society like Kenya, there is little attention paid to equal distribution of resources, a situation that leads to other persons living in a state of deprivation. The character, Chupa na Debe in *The Cockroach Dance* has been reduced to an animalized state by poverty. Normally, any person is expected to live in a clean environment, regardless of the impoverished state of their life. Yet, Mwangi focuses on Chupa na Debe who is alienated and isolated from other tenants of Dacca House by extreme poverty to show a state of deprivation in a capitalist society. This is an indication that he is already socialized into crude individualism, a situation that leads to his being mindless of those around him. This then nullifies the need for an individual like Chupa na Debe to feel part of a community that should assist a person feel appreciated, and taken care of. Anchoring on this aspect of individuals' communalism, Lutz (2009) proclaims that African humanism enables persons to understand that they are truly human, only in a community with other persons.

Concerning the adherence to the principles of African humanism, Khomba (2011) contends that this is a type of humanism that focuses on a person as not being a rugged individual, but as one who lives within society. Furthermore, Khomba also avers that in a hostile environment, it is only through such community solidarity that hunger, isolation, deprivation, poverty and emerging challenges can be survived, because of society's brotherly and sisterly concern, cooperation, care and sharing. This shows the writer's portrayal of

the current Kenyan environment, which is inhabited by persons like Chupa na Debe who have a faded sense of African humanism for themselves and others. The other demeaned characters in this literary text are Sukuma Wiki, and his wife Vuta Wiki who are poor and depend on selling vegetables for their livelihood. The author vividly and shortly reveals what Sukuma Wiki is going through due to his impoverished status: 'Sukuma Wiki, a first offender, says he has tried to sell the parking metres in order to buy his wife a new dress and to renew his hawking license which had expired' (Mwangi, 1979, p. 368). Sukuma Wiki has lost his self-dignity since stealing portrays him as a hopeless individual and only seeks to survive regardless of his self-dignity and positive contribution to the society he operates in. Indeed, Awitor (2013) insists that the analysis of *The Cockroach Dance* bluntly reveals the abject exploitation of the majority by the privileged few.

Conclusion

A close reading of *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road* and *The Cockroach Dance* unravel instances and encounters with characters entangled in twists of fate in an urban locale. This is revealed through their actions, utterances and behaviour. It is also evident that the trilogy, particularly *Kill Me Quick* chronicles both rural and urban environments, whereas the other two centre on an urban locale. However, many issues have been raised in these novels about the urban space with its dislocation of individuals' humane dispositions as their moral and cultural values gradually wane. Kenya being a capitalist nation, instances of societal stratification, neo-colonialism and globalization have largely contributed to persons' change of personality. For instance, it was found out that the spirit of African humanism is stronger when characters interact on an inter-class level – within their class. Nevertheless, when these characters interact with those in classes below or above them – the intra class, then dehumanization sets in.

In addition, Mwangi uses irony to show how the development of Nairobi, a modern capitalistic city ironically poses as part of developing modern lives of modern Kenya, yet, it breeds destructive ills of prostitution, class structures and corruption among others that contribute to the diminishing of moral values of city dwellers. Moreover, the city lures the unemployed youth into it and uses them as casual labourers who are paid peanuts. Besides, the Dacca House is also utilized by Mwangi as an image of bourgeois exploitation to ridicule the oppression and isolation of the poor by the rich that triumph in putting up skyscrapers at the expense of the dejected whom they refer to as "hands."

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