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A WALK THROUGH THE CRIMINAL'S CITY: JOHN KIRIAMITI'S MY LIFE IN CRIME AND MY LIFE IN PRISON

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

A Walk through the Criminal's City: John Kiriamiti's My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison is an examination of Kiriamiti's use of the criminal figure to represent the urban space and its discourses. Among the various ways through which this study achieves its aim is by undertaking an overview of the crime genre in terms of its history and development, particularly the most popular of which is the detective crime sub-genre. Secondly, the study examines Kiriamiti's (re)construction of the fictional criminal figure as a hero through the principles of the crime thriller. In the examination of Kiriamiti's representation of the urban space, this study digs into the various zones in which the criminal undertakes his daily activities like the bar, certain neighbourhoods and the prison. Finally, the study examines the use of stereotypes, as forming part of the discourses that order the urban space, in Kiriamiti's crime writing.

Keywords: Criminal, Crime, City, Interpellation, Reader.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Jennifer Beatrice MŨSANGI

_____day of_____, 2008.

DEDICATION

To the Late Nathan Mũnũve Kĩtonga (aka Kĩlomba- d. January, 2007) …Everyone called you the village madman; but not until 'madness' is redefined and contextualized (and convincingly so), will I go by this popular opinion. If you were here, I would ask you why you opted to call me Professor when such titles were reserved for the chosen few but since you are not, the burden lies with me. *Koma mwendwa, ũkome na ũvoo!*

To you Granny Dorcas Ngithi Ngũkũ…Soon you might be clocking a century… and together we've come from world afar and still are travelling life's pathway. You have proved over the years that a few uneducated (sounds demeaning!) geniuses can have a passion for the education of others. *I.O.U!*

And to all the bodies, living and dead, through whom a bullet has passed; fired from a rifle in the hands of a perpetrator of crime… Yes, institutionalized crime in Kenya's 2007 post-election violence, this is for you…*Bado mapambano!*

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going?", for it truly did keep my work going. To Mim, Ukpong, Gerald, Jude, Olivier, Thabiso, Nomaphelo and all my friends at Campus Lodge thank you for simply being there. I kept going because I knew I was not alone. Sheppy, thanks lots for everything (including everything). Charles Nyuykonge, thank you so much for all the 'fights' over time management and your unfailing encouragement, they really did work, *Dankie! Ngiyabonga!* To my comrades in the struggle towards the completion of our degree program: Jendele, Violet, Nomsa, Khwezi and Carolyn, guys those debates and your valuable insights cannot be taken for granted. Carolyn, girl thank you for telling me to pack and go home when I kept whining over things I had no control over…It was such a challenge, *kongoi lakwani*.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine John Kiriamiti's use of the criminal figure in the representation of the city and the discourses that order the urban space. The central argument in this study is that Kiriamiti as a writer uses narrative to reconstruct both the city and the criminal in a way that interpellates and accommodates his readers (imagined or real). This study therefore seeks to identify the various ways in which Kiriamiti as an artist reorganises the criminal's 'reality' in the city into text in My Life in Crime (1984) and My Life in Prison (2004).

The study, in its attempt to achieve the stated aim, answers certain specific questions about the criminal, the city and the narrative that links the two, that is, the crime story in general. These questions include: How are Kiriamiti's texts presented to the reader for consumption? What does the criminal know about the city that the ordinary city dweller does not? Or rather what alternative 'truths' about the urban space does the crime story unravel that are otherwise inaccessible to the reader? What and how do the crime story and the criminal appropriate particular popular discourses within the urban space?

My inquiry is motivated by among others three major factors. Firstly, the emergence of recent scholarship in popular arts in Africa in general and particularly the study of the popular novel in Kenya is an important influence in this study. There has been in the recent past (from the late 1970s to date) an alternative focus in literary studies with a shift of attention from the monopoly of the so-called 'serious' works of art to those of the popular sub-genre.[1] In Kenya, works of writers such as David G. Maillu, Charles Mangua, Carolyne Adalla, and Omondi Mak'Oloo among others have been appreciated in and incorporated into literary circles unlike in the past when such works were judged as mere "deflation of literary value" (Lindfors 1991: 51). Clearly there is an emerging need and interest in studying the 'popular' as the popular novel base continues to broaden. It is this arousal of interest in the urban popular novel that leads me into studying the works of John Kiriamiti which I believe belong to the popular category.[2] It is important for me to point out, however, that I do not intend, in any way, to idealize popular literature over 'canonical' literature because I believe both literatures are important in literary studies neither of which should be discarded in preference for the other.

Secondly, John Kiriamiti's style of writing is of particular interest in this research. The choice of Kiriamiti from among other popular Kenyan authors could be attributed to his 'popularity' as Kiriamiti the man (the robber) and as Kiriamiti the literary author. What perhaps makes Kiriamiti and his works so popular in Kenya is his adaptation of the

[1] See Fabian (1978), Barber (1987 & 1997), Lindfors (1991), Frederiksen (1991), Kurtz (1998), Granqvist (2004 & 2006), Ogude& Nyairo (2006), among others.

[2] Kiriamiti's works are considered popular owing not only to their subject matter and aesthetics but also to the influence of the readers in their composition. Son of Fate (1994) for example was written after receiving "hundreds of letters from …fans and a good number of friends who include[d] three authors advising [Kiriamiti] to try [his] hand in fiction" (Preface, Son of Fate). Similarly, the sequel to Son of Fate, The Sinister Trophy (1999), was written on request by readers and reviewers of Son of Fate in the Kenyan newspapers, The Daily Nation and The People Daily (Preface, The Sinister Trophy).

tenets of the crime thriller. It is interesting that in all his works Kiriamiti manages to make his fictionalized self so likeable that instead of being the villain that crime has turned him into, he becomes the reader's hero. Although I am not saying that Kiriamiti is the only Kenyan writer who has done this, clearly the thrilling effect that he bestows crime is beyond dispute and could be argued to be primarily the main reason behind his popularity amongst Kenyan readers. In fact Kiriamiti's My Life in Crime, in particular, was so popular in the 1980s and 1990s that alongside other popular works like David Maillu's After 4:30 and Mwangi Gicheru's Across the Bridge, students read it under their desks or under blankets with flashlights for fear of being discovered by school authorities.[3] In other cases certain pages would be folded or recommended on the first page with a catchy phrase like, "Go to page 121" or "My name is Milly…meet me on page 39" and so on. Such pages would certainly contain graphically detailed sex scenarios or naughty phrases which then any student would want to read.[4]

Thirdly, although perhaps he is not the first novelist to write on crime in Kenya,[5] Kiriamiti's My Life in Crime (1984) has been recorded as Kenya's best-selling novel of the early 1980s and the first in the urban "crime craze" (Danysh, 2001). Kiriamiti's ground-breaking crime novel spawned such works as John Kiggia Kimani's Life and Times of a Bank Robber (1988), Frank Saisi's The Bhang Syndicate (1984), and

[3] Owing to what school authorities considered explicit sexual content, students were not allowed to read or to be in possession of most of the novels belonging to the 'popular' category primarily written in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Such novels included Charles Mangua's Son of Woman and its sequel Son of Woman in Mombasa, David Maillu's After 4:30, and John Kiriamiti's My Life in Crime among others. Nevertheless, the distribution, circulation and consumption of these literatures continued to rise despite the imposed restrictions (Newell 2002:5).

[4] Personal memory. See also, Kamau Mutunga, "Reading over the Years". http://thevincentian.com/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=73&PN=0&TPN=9; and Kurtz 1998:98.

[5] Other crime novels before Kiriamiti's include Meja Mwangi's The Bushtrackers (1979), Mwangi Ruheni's The Mystery Smugglers (1975) and Paul Kitololo's Shortcut to Hell (1982) among others.

Wamugunda Geteria's Black Gold of Chepkube (1985) among others. Nevertheless, Kiriamiti is the most prolific author of the crime sub-genre with up to five titles[6] to his name among which three are quasi-autobiographical and two fictional.[7] Kiriamiti introduces an altogether different approach to the writing of the city in Kenya. This is because unlike most other Kenyan novelists who only use crime as a trope within larger themes, Kiriamiti is a pioneer in the crime writing sub-genre. Also what strikes one as interesting is the fact that unlike in most other Kenyan popular urban novels, for example, those by Meja Mwangi[8] and David Maillu, among others, Kiriamiti's city is not a place of disillusionment and eventual suffering but for the better part of it a place of joy, material success and self-definition for the criminal. Thus I believe his works present an altogether different approach to the writing of the city (particularly postcolonial Nairobi) and are worth more scholarly attention than they have been accorded in the past.[9]

[6] Kiriamiti is the most published popular author in the Spear Book series of the East African Educational Publishers according to the EAEP Book Catalogue. He could also be argued to have established a consistent pattern of publishing after every five years since the publication of his first novel in 1984; others were published in 1989, 1994, 1999 and 2004 in that order.

[7] The two texts with which this study is concerned (My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison) are 'autobiographical' and the other two Son of Fate (1994) and The Sinister Trophy (1999) fictional. In addition to the two autobiographies is the sequel to the first; My Life with a Criminal: Milly's Story (1989) in which the author appropriates Milly's (his girlfriend) voice.

[8] Meja Mwangi is one of the most established urban novelists in Kenya whose concerns with the city (particularly Nairobi) range from post-independence disillusionment to everyday city life. Mwangi is popular for his Nairobi trilogy (Kill Me Quick, Going Down River Road and Cockroach Dance). See among others Graebner (1992)

[9] There are a few works which I managed to come across before and during my research on Kiriamiti. However I realized that most critics tend to read Kiriamiti alongside other Kenyan novelists like Charles Mangua or Meja Mwangi because they are mostly concerned with either issues of modernity or simply the Kenyan urban novel and not the criminal or even Kiriamiti as a crime writer. Such critics include among others Roger Kurtz (1998), Raoul Granqvist (2004) and Tom Odhiambo (2008).

John Kiriamiti the Man and Writer: A Biography

John Baptista Wanjohi Kiriamiti was born on 14th February 1950 in Thuita Village, Kamacharia Location of Murang'a District in Central Kenya. He is the second of nine children born to Albert and Anne Wanjiru Kiriamiti, both primary school teachers (now retired) in Murang'a. Kiriamiti studied for and passed his Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) at the local primary school in his Thuita Village. He was privileged to be among the first nine African students to join the dominantly-white Prince of Wales School (now Nairobi School) at a time when most Africans could not afford the Ksh. 1,080 term fee thus preferring the relatively affordable Alliance High School whose term fee was Ksh. 100. Although Kiriamiti received bursaries as a gifted African student, he joined Prince of Wales school as a day scholar and stayed with his uncle in Bahati Estate in Nairobi's Eastlands where his elder brother Sammy stayed too. His academic life at the Prince of Wales School was short- lived though because in his last term as a form one student, at the age of fifteen, he was expelled from school after being the ring leader in a student strike. That marked the end of Kiriamiti's formal education in spite of pleas from his parents to take up school elsewhere.

As a punishment for his 'misconduct' Kiriamiti's parents decided to 'deport' him back to Murang'a where they wanted to enroll him in a village secondary school. Kiriamiti could not hear of anything else besides schooling in Nairobi and declined his parents request to attend the local school. Eventually he decided to sneak his way back into Nairobi getting away with his father's Ksh. 600. In Nairobi he had nowhere to stay as his uncle refused to take him in. Subsequently, by the age of twenty, Kiriamiti was already a known robber and in the police "V.I.P list", as he calls 'the most wanted' police list. As a criminal, Kiriamiti went by the names John Khamwene, Charles

Lukindo, Richard Mwangi, Albert Ngure, Albert Wanjohi and Jack Zollo (a name which he uses for his fictionalized self in both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison) among others.

After a long chase with the police, Kiriamiti was arrested and sent to jail in 1971 for twenty years with forty eight strokes of the cane. It is at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison and Naivasha Government Maximum Prison that his first novel My Life in Crime was written and the initial ideas of My Life in Prison born. Five months after the publication of My Life in Crime (in 1984), Kiriamiti was released on grounds of good conduct having served thirteen out of his twenty years sentence. Kiriamiti's freedom however did not last long for two years down the line (in 1986) he was sent back to jail by President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi's regime for allegedly being involved in what the government deemed a seditious movement meant to overthrow the government (*Mwakenya*).[10] This time Kiriamiti found himself head-on with the law after Benga musician-turned-soldier, Hajullas Ochieng Kabaselle, implicated him in crime. "Ochieng, on his arrest while serving in the Army, claimed that he had left his machine gun with me to use in bank robberies for the funding of Mwakenya," Kiriamiti says in an interview with Joe Ombuor (ibid).

Having had interacted with most of the brains thought to be behind the *Mwakenya* movement like Onyango Oloo, Prof. Katama Mkangi, Mwandawiro Mgangha and

[10] See Joe Ombuor, "Fame and Glory from Writing after Long", Sunday Nation 27/02/2005, http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/27022005/DailyMagazine/Lifestyle5.htm and "Ex-robber's War on Crime", Sunday Nation 27/02/2005, http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/27022005/DailyMagazine/Lifestyle13.htm.

others, Kiriamiti was a natural suspect to the authorities.[11] Resultantly, he earned himself a seven-year sentence for the alleged involvement in a clandestine movement. However, he was released after four years on February 11, 1990 (the same day that South Africa's freedom icon, Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island). As fate would have it, two days later, after Kiriamiti's release, what was thought to be the political assassination of the Foreign Affairs Minister Hon. John Robert Ouko on February 13, 1990 linked him to yet another 'suspicious look' from Kenyans, as rumour had it that he "was released to kill Ouko" (Ombuor 2005:2).

Nevertheless, since his trading of the gun for a pen (to use the words of Kamau Mutunga), and his subsequent release from Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, Kiriamiti has become a renowned philanthropist and social reformist rehabilitating street children and thieves in his rural Murang'a home. Besides writing novels, Kiriamiti also owns and edits a newspaper, 'The Sharpener' which he established after the government ban on the Gikuyu version *Inooro* in 1995.[12]

My Life in Crime is the first novel written by John Kiriamiti. Part of the novel was written at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison and the rest at Naivasha Government Maximum Prison both prisons in which Kiriamiti served thirteen years imprisonment for robbery with violence. The novel, Kiriamiti tells us, was published only five months

[11] See We Lived to Tell: The Nyayo House Story,

2003.

[12] *Inooro* (literally Sharpener) was a critical Catholic magazine whose past, present and future issues were banned by the Moi government in February 1995 on grounds of unwarranted criticism against the government. See "Censorship in Kenya: Government Critics Face the Death Sentence", http://www.article19.org.

prior to his acquittance and subsequent release from prison, that is, in May 1984. In fact when the novel was released and was discovered by the prison authorities, Kiriamiti was sent into solitary confinement (a prison within prison) for a hundred days as a punishment for writing while serving a jail term (My Life in Prison, 197).

In this 'autobiographical' novel, John Kiriamiti narrates how at only 15 years, he (as Jack Zollo) is expelled from school, becomes an amateur pickpocket and eventually graduates into a violent bank robber. In simple yet candid language, Kiriamiti takes the reader into the criminal underworld of Jack Zollo which is 'densely populated' with prostitutes, robbers, forgers, carjackers, police and other men and women with whom Zollo deals in his life of crime. With an interesting attention to detail, Kiriamiti describes certain areas of Nairobi (including various sites of consumption such as bars, hotel rooms, and so on) and Zollo's peculiar utilization of such areas.

In an action-packed scenario (and language) Kiriamiti describes how at one point the police are searching for Zollo in the whole of Nairobi and he has to flee to the Congo. It is only in the Congo that Zollo (as Albert Ngure) leads a life outside crime as a chauffeur to a Greek millionaire (Stephano).[13] However, he has to flee back to Nairobi after Elizabeth and Hellene (his boss's secretary and daughter, respectively) threaten to commit suicide because they are both pregnant by him. On his escape, he steals Stephano's 1.5 million Congolese Francs an action that rekindles his 'cat and mouse

[13] By leading a 'straight' life once in the Congo, Kiriamiti is in a certain way saying that the criminal operates within certain territories and not others. Although Zollo steals from Stephano on the day he escapes, he confesses to both his boss (Stephano) and to the readers that he regrets his deeds. This is so much unlike the Zollo who has picked pockets, broken cars and robbed banks in Nairobi before, without any traces of guilt.

game' with the police. He is arrested at the airport in Rwanda but manages to escape through Uganda into Kenya.

Once back in Nairobi, Zollo decides to quit crime and get a job for himself as advised by Milly (his girlfriend) but that fails because he is too broke to quit. He decides to pull one last but big job before he can retire. He is involved in the biggest bank robbery of the time in Naivasha (on 4th November, 1970) after which two of his gang members are gunned down by police and three others arrested. He decides to go hiding at home for some time since he is the only one at large. In the meantime, Milly discloses to Zollo that she is pregnant and she wants not only marriage but also a wedding ceremony. It is on the eve of the wedding that Zollo is arrested (14th December, 1970) in his village in Thuita, Murang'a.

It is interesting to note Kiriamiti's creation of Zollo as one indomitable character who slips through virtually anything from airport authorities to police. By creating such a myth around Zollo as indispensable, Kiriamiti certainly presents to his implied readers a 'heroic villain'. Zollo demonstrates the heroism of the criminal for example as he escapes arrest through almost unbelievable means in his "struggle for survival against the forces of law" (My Life in Crime: Blurb). For instance, Zollo escapes through the tiny window of a toilet at the Astrida Airport as guards wait with guns at the door. Again, after the 'big' loot at Naivasha's Barclays Bank, when every member of his gang is either killed or arrested by the police, Zollo still remains 'untouched': he is the only one who manages to escape. Zollo emerges at this point as a hero in the criminal underworld who outdoes even the 'law'. The reader is persuaded therefore not only to

sympathize with Zollo when he is finally arrested and sent to jail but convert him from his position as a supposed villain, into a hero.

My Life in Prison is, indisputably, a continuation of the first novel (My Life in Crime) although published twenty years later by the 'popular wing' of East African Educational Publishers, Spear Books, in 2004. The novel begins with the arrival of Jack Zollo at the Nairobi Law Courts where he is convicted and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment with forty eight strokes of the cane. Zollo's prison term gets him distraught so much that he at some point becomes violent (beating up fellow prisoners and wardens), feigns insanity, gets admission into an asylum and eventually escapes from the Mathare Mental Hospital (where he is admitted after a major 'spell of madness'). However, his freedom lasts only a few hours before he is rearrested.

Back in prison, however, Zollo becomes strong in spirit and is ready to survive the 'harsh conditions' in jail, for instance, feeding on one potato a day. However, what surfaces in this novel is the way in which Zollo narrates his conquests in the city and adventures as a criminal and how he is constantly at war with the state agents of 'discipline'. For Zollo, at this point, prison just like the city is the custodian of certain possibilities that perhaps he cannot get elsewhere (say in the village). Although in the city he has to constantly flee from the agents of 'law and order' to survive, in prison Zollo seems to be celebrating 'a life well-led' and which he is determined to continue with in prison against all odds. In fact Zollo gains popularity in prison both with the prison authorities and fellow inmates and equally maintains his heroic position throughout his prison life.

In this novel Kiriamiti narrates various instances in which inmates and prison warders are engaged in killing sprees thus heightening enmity between the two major occupants of prison. Being the hero that he is, Zollo manages to bring back peace in prison by recruiting fellow inmates into a peace-seeking syndicate. Again, like in My Life in Crime, Zollo is transformed by Kiriamiti's narrative from the crime-inclined convict that he is into a celebrated hero. Nevertheless, Zollo is ultimately released from prison and goes back to the free city where he hopes to put the skills he has learned into practice. After trying for some time, Zollo gives up on life in the city and goes back to his Murang'a home.

Like most other crime novels, for example John Kiggia Kimani's Life and Times of a Bank Robber, both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison end at a rather moralizing note with what Roger Kurtz calls a "conservative hegemonic message", the usual 'crime does not pay' conclusion (1998:106). For instance, in My Life in Crime, Zollo says, "... I am a reformed person. I am wholly decided to be on the right side of the law as long as I live. The main reason is that I have learnt that *crime does not pay*..." (215; my emphasis). This conclusion is rather interesting because although Zollo's crime may appear to the reader to be a subversion of morality, Zollo emerges as a person who has had his privileges in the city and in prison owing to his reputation as a successful criminal. It is interesting to realize how easily the prison becomes a city of sorts for Zollo for there appears to be no strong demarcation between the two (city and prison).

Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

In the pages that follow I attempt to give a brief and historical background to discourses of law and order in Kenya. What exactly is criminality? Who defines crime? Can there be formal and informal definitions and perceptions of crime in certain contexts? I believe this background information provides an important theoretical framework for this discussion because only then can we begin to understand the criminal as a literary and social construct. Secondly, I attempt to provide a general overview of the crime genre in order to be able to situate and contextualize the works with which this study is concerned within this particular genre. Various types of crime stories will be discussed in an attempt to closely explore what exactly the crime story entails.

The relationship between political/cultural norms and what may be considered criminal activities provides an important historical background for understanding issues of law and order in Kenya. Indeed, it is almost impossible to discuss Kenya's history, particularly the evolution of modern discourses of law and order, without invoking issues of colonialism and how the colonial situation (dis)ordered the Kenyan society. The major issue with which I am concerned here is how the concept of criminality has evolved over time and its subsequent ambiguities within Kenya's colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Chloe Campbell, in his analysis of juvenile delinquency in colonial Kenya, argues that amongst the most dreaded issues by the settler community was crime and disorder. The European minority, Campbell posits, "was highly sensitive to the threat of crime perpetrated by the African majority" (2002: 129). Most of these crimes of which the

settler community was so scared were mostly perceived to be committed in cities where the presence of unemployed youth posed a threat to the colonial order. Like in the neighbouring Tanzanian town of Dar es Salaam, for colonial officials in Kenya, "the most disturbing aspect of urbanization amongst young Africans was the fear of disorder" (Burton 2001:202).

Clearly, for the British colonial authorities in Kenya, juvenile crime was often regarded as "a manifestation of the social and economic changes associated with urbanization" which, Campbell argues, resonated with British discourses about urban juvenile crime and disorder (2002:130). But what order was there for the African youths to be perceived as disordering by colonial authorities whether in cities or in the villages? Was that colonial order considered as such by African authorities and societies? Did the concept of crime invoke a similar sense among the Africans as it did among the white settler minority?

Among the Maasai and the Kalenjin communities of Kenya, for example, in the 1930s stock theft was an acceptable form of accumulation of wealth which brought with it a certain prestige for those involved and their families. In colonial Kenya, this kind of theft began to raise concern when Maasai and Kalenjin young men began to raid white settler farms for cattle. However, the imposition of colonial legislation on criminality could not work in these cases because to the communities involved what they were doing could not be considered crime. According to David Anderson, settler opinion held that stock theft continued to thrive because of the "social prestige" attached to the 'crime' in African communities.

> The unwillingness of the African public to assist in the prevention and detection of stock theft had long been interpreted as a tacit sanctioning of such theft, leading to the conclusion that *within the 'moral economy' of many African communities, stock theft was not thought of as a crime at all*. (Anderson 1986:399; emphasis mine)

This ambiguity in the definition of criminality could be argued to emanate from the fact that, as Ralph Austen has it, the "norms against which criminality [was] defined in Western tradition–the sanctity of private property and the territorial sovereignty of the state–[had] a much weaker resonance in African cultures" (1986:385). For the African communities, what the colonial authorities perceived as crime was actually a sport for young men. Quoting the then Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner in 1959, Anderson reports, "after all…stock theft is the traditional sport of the young men in many tribes and the elders cannot be expected to act as kill-joys and stamp it out unless they themselves are liable to suffer" (1986:399).

However, as Campbell (2002: 141) argues, since law and order had always been a powerful political issue for European settlers, the colonial authorities had to find a way of punishing 'criminals' in order to restore order within the British colony. Owing to the belief that stock theft was not a crime amongst the Maasai and Kalenjin communities, the colonial administration had to put forward a form of legislation to deal with the crime. Families and sometimes communities to which these raiders belonged would be punished collectively to discourage members of the various communities from perpetuating further raids (Anderson1986:399). The Maasai and Kalenjin stock theft case is only one among many cases in which criminality could not be clearly defined thus remaining a fluid concept that depended on the "moral economy" (to quote Anderson 1986) of the people defining crime and the perpetrators of such 'crimes'. The

fact that the colonial authorities were able to eventually come up with legislation on this crime and its punishment shows how much the execution of law and order depends on ruling and hegemonic powers.

The colonial legacy of law and order was rocketed to perfection by postcolonial Kenyan leaders in the years subsequent to the country's independence in 1963. The postcolonial governing (which also doubled up as the ruling) class emphasized the need for law and order in the newborn state. Through what Atieno Odhiambo calls the "ideology of order" the governing/ruling class imposed 'order' on the people while they themselves wallowed in an aura of legal lawlessness. "The ideology of order", Odhiambo (1987) says "spells out: the need for obedience among the governed rather than any profound acceptance of the rulers" so that the newly acquired expectations and the levels of activity of the ruled are successfully lowered by the political elite (189). Order, for the Kenyan ruling class, became a tool of 'silencing' dissidents so that people perceived to be a danger to that order had to be dealt with by the state. These dissidents were those who insisted on the need for accountability in society (Odhiambo 1987:189).

It is ironic that those who demanded accountability, transparency and democratic rule were perceived as interfering with law and order while those who actually encouraged lawlessness remained the guardians of order. For instance, Odhiambo (1987:195) tells us, it is on record that by the year 1975 the then president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and his wife Mama Ngina Kenyatta owned over 1 million acres of land along the Kenyan coast; land which six years later, in 1981, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga revealed was grabbed from *wananchi* (the common people). This resonates with Odhiambo's views that the ideology of order entails "the entrusting of the management of the state to a bureaucracy; the

need for accumulation and concentration of power in the hands of political elite, and not its dispersion into society; and legal lawlessness by the ruling class" (1987:189). Up to this point then law and order remain volatile concepts where it is not clear what exactly would be termed as lawlessness since this depends largely on who is doing what. It becomes a concept dependent on who is perpetuating an act and not what act is being perpetuated.

With the passing on of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the commencement of Daniel Toroitich arap Moi's rule in 1978, the concept of law and order became a clear-cut path for the rule of law, or what in Odhiambo's words may be termed as "Party of Order", to prevail (1987:190). With his Nyayo Philosophy of Peace, Love and Unity, President Moi was keen on 'silencing' any individuals who posed a threat to this philosophy and to order. Such dissidents were detained without trial in Kenyan prisons or at the (in)famous Nyayo Torture Chambers in the Nairobi's city centre in order for law and order to be maintained in the country. Such people included writers and politicians such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Maina wa Kinyatti, Wahome Mutahi, Raila Odinga among others.[14] The state at this time became more concerned with maintenance of law and order more than it was about democracy for "he rules best, and lasts longest, who can ensure that law and order, in other words internal security, is paramount" (Odhiambo 1987: 190).

In present postcolonial Kenya, the same ambiguities over issues of law, order and criminality continue to exist with undeniable discrepancies between what may be

[14] See Maina Kiai's editorial to We Lived to tell: The Nyayo House Story. (2003).

termed as formal and informal definitions. By formal definition, I am referring to the state-centric definition of crime, that is, what according to state law may be defined as crime. Informal definition, on the other hand, entails that which state law defines as crime while the perpetrators of the 'crime' fail to peg criminality to the activities undertaken thereof. For example, in the January-February 2008 skirmishes in Kenya where people turned against and killed each other owing to the disputed 2007 presidential election results how exactly would one define criminality? Do we focus on the criminality of the political class or that of the ruled? Who exactly is interfering with law and order and who is responsible for punishing the state if it is the state that is perpetuating crime? Clearly, law and order are political and social constructs whose execution depends on the governing class (also known as the state) or authority.

Despite the various issues that make the definition and identification/labeling of crime and criminals (as discussed above) such an elusive task, in literature, there definitely is a genre that deals with crime. Regardless of what the creators of the stories in this literary genre seem to identify as crime, in the pages that follow I will grapple with issues of what exactly makes a crime story.

The Crime Story

Whether in film, 'true' crime, or fiction, crime writing in all its various forms is one of the most visible genres in literature today. In fact, crime itself seems to be a major preoccupation in present day society. Crime is one of the aspects of life which gets what Michael Gilbert (publication date unavailable), in the editorial to Crime in Good Company: Essays on Criminals and Crime-writing, calls "good press" all over the world. "Next to politics and sports, with which it has strong affinities", Gilbert posits, "[crime] is the most permanently engrossing …topic" (v). In spite of the fact that crime

is, in itself, may be considered a sign of a 'diseased' society, all forms of crime writing have an undeniable appeal and attraction to particular audiences. There are numerous art works focusing on crime in present day's art world. For example crime seems to be getting popular in movie theatres in form of crime films and also in bookshops and bookstores as various other fictions of crime. Resultantly, crime fiction characters and film actors have become almost legendary in households.[15] Whether focusing on criminals, detectives or even crime victims, the crime genre allows the crime writer certain possibilities which perhaps other writers in different genres do not have, for it to capture audiences and reading publics. This is not to state however that only crime stories tend to get their audiences hooked but rather that the crime genre cannot be simply ignored in present day's society, which as Jon Thompson puts it, is fascinated by crime (1993:1).

Like Gilbert (earlier mentioned), Thompson argues that contemporary society's obsession with crime is not only exhibited through films and other fictions of crime but also through what he calls "ideologically coded accounts of 'real-life' crime", the most obvious of which, Thompson says, is the evening news whose

> substantial portion...is devoted to covering the most sensational crimes of the day. Similarly television "newsmagazines" specialize in, among other things, lurid "investigations" of crimes, criminals, or criminal patterns supposedly sweeping the nation. Talk shows, likewise, seek to exploit [society's] fascination with crime by interviewing criminals, victims, or the police–sometimes simultaneously. (1993:1)

[15] I have in mind such characters as James Bond in Ian Fleming's *007* novel/movie series (such as From Russia with Love, Never Say Die and Casino Royale among others) and Chuck Norris in the (in)famous television series, Walker Texas Ranger. Others include Tsotsi in the South African 2005 Oscar award winning movie adaptation of Athol Fugard's novel, Tsotsi, by the same title, among others.

Interestingly, Thompson in his postulation uses the term *sensational* to qualify the crime stories of which he speaks. What is so thrilling and exciting in crime or narratives of crime, to justify the use of the term? Firstly, it is imperative that this study briefly gives an overview of the crime genre in literature because it is only then that the sensationalism of crime writing –and criminals by extension– can be clearly understood.

Different categories of stories may be classified as crime fiction or crime writing[16] in literature. For a long time the detective crime story has become almost synonymous to crime writing in the world with a large number of creative works and a considerable degree of critical attention being devoted to this sub-genre more than to any other.[17] Usually, the detective crime story takes any form along the 'caper story–police procedural' continuum. In a caper story, the criminal is known to the reader and he commits crime (for instance murder, theft and rape, all at once) in the view of the reader. The story's focus then is on the crime sequence and the criminal and although there are detectives or the police in the story, they are never the centre of focus. The story is characterized by elements of humour, adventure, or unusual cleverness or audacity of the criminal. This type of story could be argued to be close to the originally Spanish picaresque story only that the latter has as its protagonist a rogue of a low social class who survives through his wits which may not necessarily involve crime *per se*.[18]

[16] Where *writing* is used and not *fiction*, it refers to all types of writing whose focus is crime including the autobiography, 'true' crime and so on.

[17] For critical works on the detective crime subgenre see for instance, Patricia Maida, Murder She Wrote: A Study of Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction, (1982); and Dennis Porter, The Pursuit of Crime; Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction, (1981).

[18] For further discussion on the picaresque see for example, Edward Richards, Towards a Theory of the Picaresque Novel, (1983) and Richard Bjornson, The Picaresque Hero in European Literature, (1977).

The police procedural, on the other hand, revolves around a person or people, usually law agents, at work, for example, police collecting evidence and other forensic procedures. Usually both the reader and the detective or police unravel the mystery together in a police procedural. The Kenyan writer Frank Saisi's The Bhang Syndicate (1984) is such an example of a police procedural in which a Scotland Yard trained police investigator Captain Kip follows Kenya's drug traffickers in the 1970s.

The detective crime subgenre was first popularized by 19th century writers in Britain and America beginning with Edgar Allan Poe's short stories of mystery and Arthur Conan Doyle through what has come to be known as the Sherlock Holmes myth, or the "Sherlockian fascination" as John Simons has it (1990:85). In Doyle's fiction, Sherlock Holmes is such an experienced and 'perfect' detective that even his own creator (author Doyle), Thompson (1993) argues, had problems 'assassinating' him in the short story "The Final Problem" (60). Another popular writer in this category is the detective crime writer Agatha Christie with her fictional 60-70 year-old spinster detective Miss Jane Marple (popularly known as Miss Marple). Miss Marple was first created by Agatha Christie in a short story which was published in The Royal Magazine as early as 1927 but only appeared in a full-length novel in Christie's first crime novel The Murder at the Vicarage (1930). Henceforth, Miss Marple became the sole chief detective in twelve of Christie's novels.[19] It is such characters as Holmes and Miss Marple, who like the detective crime subgenre in which they have been created and established, have come to dominate discussions on crime fiction almost the world over.

[19] Information available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss_Marple.

In fact, it could be argued that most fictional detectives have become even more famous than their creators with some 'living' long after their chief architects are dead. For example, Sherlock Holmes may be better known than Conan Doyle ever was in his entire lifetime. Some critics have even argued that it is difficult to think of Sherlock Holmes as a fictional character since he is not only found in Doyle's fiction but continues to solve mysteries in various novels and films by other authors.[20] Interestingly also, some people believe that Sherlock Holmes is actually a real detective and often write letters asking him to solve their life mysteries. In the words of Jerry Palmer (1978), "Letters are still to this day addressed to Sherlock Holmes, Esq., 221B Baker Street, asking him to find missing relatives or cut inflation at a stroke" (1).

Similarly, Agatha Christie's fictional detective Jane Marple (Miss Marple) has continued to live long after the death of Christie, both on television and other media.[21] This apparent 'immortality' and invincibility of crime fiction characters simply serves to show the need for the crime writer to convince his or her reader into believing the crime story, that is, as Gilbert argues, the crime story must be true to itself. Closer home, in Africa, Rhodesian-born (now Zimbabwe) Alexander McCall Smith's Precious Ramotswe's (Mma Ramotswe) detective endeavors in Botswana, is an example of what one would call amateur-but-witty detective stories that continue to dominate discussions on detective crime fiction in literature on Africa. Having solved mysteries in all eight of McCall's 'The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series' novels (The No. 1

[20] Together with Freud, for instance, Holmes solves a mystery in Nicholas Meyer's The Seven per cent Solution (1975). See Jon Thompson, Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism, (1993).

[21] Over three decades after the death of her creator (Christie died in 1976), Miss Marple still lives with her latest appearance being on the British television channel (ITV) third series, Agatha Christie's Marple (popularly known as Marple) in early 2007. Information available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss_Marple.

Ladies' Detective Agency, 1999; Tears of the Giraffe, 2000; Morality for Beautiful Girls, 2001; The Kalahari Typing School for Men, 2002; The Full Cupboard of Life, 2004; In the Company of Cheerful Ladies, 2004; Blue Shoes and Happiness, 2006; and The Good Husband of Zebra Drive, 2007), Mma Ramotswe has certainly become Africa's answer to Europe's Miss Marple.

It is important to note however that although the detective crime sub-genre is the most popular of the crime subgenres, there are other writers who write within the same genre but who have not received as much critical attention as those in this popular sub-genre.[22] Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here that matters of genre tend to obscure rather than reveal certain peculiar characteristics of a particular work not only in crime fiction but in literature in general. According to Ian Bell and Graham Daldry (1990) in the preface to Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Writing, genre criticism only concentrates upon representative features which then tend to homogenize works of literature into certain categories. "Genre", Bell and Daldry say, "becomes a kind of grid through which individual works are appraised [and] inevitably such criticism covertly devalues the works it articulates, turning them into versions of some recurrent ideal" (x). Nevertheless, this overview of the crime genre is important in this study because although crime stories may be as varied as there are crime fiction authors, there is need to take into consideration certain dominant features of a particular piece of work which qualifies it to be in a particular genre category and not another.

[22] For other types of crime stories and the origin of crime fiction, see Stephen Knight. Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction. (1980); particularly Chapter One.

Drawing on this chapter's discussion so far, our methodology is designed around the three major concepts with which this study is concerned namely; the urban space/ city, crime, and writing/ reading strategies. Firstly, the city is read in this study as a text and particularly as represented by John Kiriamiti through Zollo. The city specifically refers to Nairobi as perceived by the criminal and as textualised by Kiriamiti for as Nieburg (2006) argues, "[t]he reading of [the] city is usually filtered through the lens of prior knowledge that emanates from the experience of another: writer, artist, photographer…" (1). Secondly, I am reading Zollo as a criminal with reference to pick pocketing, car breaking and robbery. In reading/ writing strategies, in the chapters that follow, I examine the narrative techniques which the crime thriller writer (Kiriamiti in specific) uses and how these techniques influence the consumption of those texts by the implied reader.

The focus on the criminal figure in the analysis of My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison justifies 'importation' of ideas and concepts from studies on crime fiction and criminology. Insights from critics of the crime genre like Ian Bell (1990), Graham Daldry (1990), Jon Thompson (1993), and Simon Dentith (1990), among others are useful in highlighting and illustrating certain arguments in this study. Although none of the critics from whom this study borrows is directly addressing the crime genre in African or even Kenyan fiction, their works provide significant insights which I have used in the analysis of Kiriamiti's works. I have appropriated their observations on crime fiction in an attempt to understand both the protagonist in and the author of the primary texts in this study. Dentith (1990) for example, in his examination of the representation of Paris in the novels of William Mcllvanney posits that crime writing is a way of contemplating the realities of urban life and through the crime story, the novelist seeks to narrate the mysteries of the city (18). This appears to be a compelling argument in

this study especially in the examination of Kiriamiti's representation of Jack Zollo as an 'urban planner' and the 'realities and mysteries' of the various territories into which he (Zollo) takes the reader within the urban space.

Thompson (1993) concurs with Dentith in arguing that "crime writing offers myths of the experience of modernity" (5). In this study I assume, like Thompson, that both the city and its inhabitants are products of modernization and through crime fiction the author gives a detailed account of the "disintegration, and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" experienced by the urbanite (Berman, 1972; quoted in Thompson 1993:8). I particularly interrogate whether the city promises Zollo adventure, power and joy or whether there is a looming destruction in the city that throughout his criminal life Zollo struggles with? In fact, Zollo is so fascinated with the city that when his parents take him to the village in Murang'a, as a punishment for being expelled from school, he sneaks back into Nairobi where he begins his life in crime (My Life in Crime, 3). Similarly, after he is released from prison, Zollo goes back to Nairobi for "if it was the place where [he] had wasted [his] life, it was where [he] intended to pick up the lost threads" (My Life in Prison, 209).

Zollo's fascination with the city calls for a close examination of the criminal's operations in the urban space and his perception of the same. Works of various scholars and critics whose interest is in urbanization and urban culture in particular have been used in this study. Of particular importance in the analysis of this study's primary texts is the large volume of work done by various scholars on Nairobi urban literature and culture. Such scholars include Bodil Frederiksen (2002), Raoul Granqvist (2006), Nici Nelson (1996), and Luise White (1990), among others. For instance, Nici Nelson's study on the

representation of women, men, city and town in Kenyan novels is important in this study in that Nelson identifies a certain trend amongst Kenyan novelists in which rural women are represented as 'better in morals' than urban women. This idea is useful in the analysis of Kiriamiti's representation of such urban women as barmaids and prostitutes. For example, in My Life in Crime, Kiriamiti constantly speaks of almost all the women with whom he has contact in the city as prostitutes whether they are his neighbours in Wood Street or barmaids (especially Suzy) and other female patrons at his favourite Kagondo Bar.

Additionally, Luise White's study of prostitution in colonial Nairobi has been significantly appropriated in this study. Although hers is a study of prostitution within a temporal space different from the context in which Kiriamiti's texts are set, her work is of particular importance in the present study of Kiriamiti's novels especially in examining how Kiriamiti uses the myth of the prostitute figure to tell the story of the criminal as the heroic villain and his conquests (which include sexual prowess). White's concept of prostitution as offering 'comforts of home', specifically, assists in evaluating Kiriamiti's use of the popular myth of the Kenyan urban woman (especially the barmaid) as a prostitute who offers sanctuary for the criminal as a fugitive. These studies on Nairobi and its literature are important especially in the chapter on 'popular discourses' because these discourses form part of the larger Nairobi popular imagination and are a major boost to the criminal's heroism.

It is worth mentioning that the borrowing of ideas and concepts from other disciplines other than literature stems from the interdisciplinary nature of popular literature which according to Odhiambo (2004) "calls on the researcher to acknowledge the benefits of

cross referencing the primary literature with material from the social sciences and other disciplines in the humanities" (4).

In a nutshell, in this chapter, I have provided a background to the study in terms of specific research aims, how the study has pursued them and a brief outline of the research argument. I have also looked at the emergence and 'literary life' of John Kiriamiti by giving a brief background to his criminal life and his works. Thirdly, this chapter has provided a general literature review of the two novels, My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison which are the objects of my study while highlighting various aspects of the two texts which are crucial in this study. One other important thing that I have done in this chapter is to provide a rather broad theoretical framework within which the study is carried out as pertains issues of law and order in Kenya. Also, I have given an overview of the crime genre with particular attention to the most popular of all the genres of crime writing, the detective crime story. Finally, several theoretical considerations which have been appropriated in the entire study have been highlighted in this introductory chapter.

In Chapter Two, I seek to analyze the general image of the criminal in Kenya as defined by issues of morality, law and order. Secondly in the same chapter I examine the various ways in which Kiriamiti as a literary author manages to present the criminal figure in an image that is contrary to that of the criminal villain while at the same time presenting crime as a subversion of morality. In other words, what I set out to do in Chapter Two is to examine the various techniques that Kiriamiti uses to interpellate his reader so that to the reader, the criminal is not a villain but a hero (heroic villain).

Chapter Three majorly focuses on Nairobi as an urban space and the general representation of this urban space in Kenyan fiction. Also, in this chapter I interrogate the various ways in which Kiriamiti's representation of Nairobi differs from that of other Kenyan authors owing to the criminal's personalization of various city spaces. In Chapter Four, I look at the various ways in which the criminal figure appropriates certain popular discourses (which I discuss under the rubric stereotypes) and how Kiriamiti as a crime writer seeks to interpellate his readers through the use of that which is familiar to them. Finally, Chapter Five is the study's conclusion chapter which gives a summary of the previous discussion. Additionally I use this chapter as a space to reflect on and elaborate the findings of the study thus highlighting other potential areas or approaches to the Kenyan popular urban novel in general or to the works of John Kiriamiti that surfaced in the course of the study. In this chapter also I have attempted to identify the various ways through which Kiriamiti's works contribute to the field of literature and what makes them worth the kind of literary attention which I have accorded them.

CHAPTER TWO

"ROBBERY WITHOUT CRIME": WHEN THE CRIMINAL BECOMES A FIGURE OF ADMIRATION

> To be acceptable, a crime story must only be true to itself. It must be the right shape, its premises must carry its conclusions, and it must not cheat. (Michael Gilbert, Crime in Good Company: Essays on Criminals and Crime-Writing)

The focus of this chapter is to examine how Kiriamiti constructs the criminal as a hero rather than a villain. I am particularly interested in the manner in which the reader is drawn actively into the text as an accomplice in the protagonist's crime. I argue, in this chapter, that Kiriamiti as a writer presents to the reader what one would refer to as a heroic villain, a move which then draws the reader's sympathy towards the criminal. It would be a futile exercise to examine issues of the criminal's transformation from villainy to heroism if the place of the criminal in society is not defined. Why should this chapter assume that the criminal is obviously a villain? Why is Kiriamiti's representation of Jack Zollo as a hero a (re)construction of the criminal figure or what makes Kiriamiti's representation of Jack Zollo unusual? In order to execute the stated chapter objective, I seek to answer the following questions: who defines crime and criminals in society? Does morality have a role in defining crime and criminals? If yes, whose morality and what is the place of that morality in the definition of crime and criminals in crime texts? And finally, does the so-defined criminal subvert or reinforce the dominant morality? This interrogation of issues of morality is important because it

is only after identifying the definition of crime and the criminal in the society that one can actually analyze Kiriamiti's (re)construction of Jack Zollo.

Any considerations of the moral dimensions of the crime story inevitably raise questions on the meaning of the word morality itself in the present context and exactly whose morality we are concerned with. Is it the morality of the author, that of the reader or the morality of the world of the text? In this chapter I will focus on the morality of the world in which Jack Zollo lives and operates in My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison. In other words this chapter is concerned with the (im)moral world inhabited by Jack Zollo and which Kiriamiti explores in the texts under study. Morality in both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison is almost inseparable from immorality, for there seems to be no divide between good and evil in Zollo's world. In a world where the society in general is expected to be the custodian of moral values but which instead seems to be wallowing in vice, morality becomes an elusive term and concept to define. The police and prison warders, for example, who are the agents of law and order and who in essence are in a higher capacity to define crime seem to be surviving by the same principles of 'immorality' as the so-called criminal. For instance at Naivasha Government Maximum Prison, the prison warders are terrorists who beat, maim and even kill prisoners for no apparent reason. As Zollo puts it, once one is behind the high prison walls there seems to be no difference between prison authorities and prisoners because they all use the same criminal methods of survival: "Prison and prisoners. To tell you the truth I don't know which is worse. In my opinion they are equally bad" (My Life in Prison, 114).

Outside prison, in the 'free' city almost everyone seems to be involved in some sort of crime. Interestingly some of the criminal activities that most people in society are involved in, do not seem to be crime to them because they are doing whatever it is as a means of survival. They are practicing some form of legalized crime, a crime legalized by the society in which they live. For instance, Milly's (Zollo's girlfriend) mother, Salome Wangari is, perhaps according to state law, a criminal who should be in jail for operating an illegal business and use of a weapon. Zollo says of Wangari:

> [Milly's] mother, Salome Wangari, had rented a room for her and her two young sisters and two rooms for herself. One room she used for *selling unlicensed beer*. A very nice woman Salome was but if you wanted to know that she carried a Somali knife, all you had to do was pretend to be very intoxicated and on your way out, go in the direction where her daughters slept! If you did not get a stab in the back, she admired you, but at least you would have found yourself getting up from the ground where she would have thrown you. (My Life in Crime, 41; emphasis mine)

Interestingly, Wangari is not in jail and in fact even her customers like Zollo and others do not perceive her as a criminal; she is just a hustler like many others in Nairobi. As Zollo tells us most of the criminals in society are not in jail. For example after Zollo and Rashid manage to break out of prison, they travel all the way to Mombasa to get money and precious stones that Rashid had left behind at a hotel on his arrest. When Zollo gets a share of Rashid's property (a third of the money and precious stones) he feels an irresistible urge to go to Murang'a to see his family. On reaching Murang'a, Zollo remembers that he is supposed to convey a message to G.G's (Zollo's friend in prison) family on his behalf. As Zollo himself puts it, using the sane part of his brain he writes a letter to G.G's brother and using the insane part of the brain puts Ksh. 300 (out of his share of Rashid's loot) in the same envelope to facilitate G.G's visit in jail by his brother. Zollo humorously captures the incident when he says: "I didn't see his [the person to

deliver the letter] mouth water but all I can tell you is that the letter still hasn't reached GG's brother, which goes to show you that *the majority of thieves are not even in prison*" (My Life in Prison, 56; emphasis added).

If this is the world in which Jack Zollo operates then what is (im)morality and what makes Zollo a villain? Ultimately, Zollo is as (im)moral as everyone else, from Wangari who is hustling with unlicensed beer to Mota Singh modifying stolen cars. However, Zollo has openly transgressed and crossed a certain moral order set by the authorities and he is what, debatably though, can be referred to as a conventional criminal. Nevertheless, although he may not deserve the reader's sympathy, Zollo manages to win admiration from not only the reader but also other characters in his world. Indeed Zollo is a sort of Robin Hood criminal who operates on a kind of morality which does not cohere with that of the authority but he is at the same time a lovable rogue. According to Judith Rhodes, "around the true Robin Hood type there exists a distinct aura of romance, although his (and it is almost invariably a he) morality is generally questionable and his code of conduct frequently bizarre" (1999:388). Unlike in other genres, political prison literature for example, where the protagonists already have the reader's sympathy at the onset of their story, in the crime genre (especially when the criminal is faced with the duty of telling his own story) the writer has to fully convince the reader to sympathize with the criminal. But then how does the writer execute such an exigent task?

Before I can answer the question on how the writer wins the reader's sympathy for an otherwise undeserving character, firstly, it is crucial to mention here that many African writers in whose works crime can be marked out explore what Julian Symons (1972) in

Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel calls the "borderland between the crime story and the novel". Although it may not be clear what exactly Symons means when he refers to a novel as different from a story, his argument is that having a crime story within a larger thematic framework is totally different from having a story whose major theme is crime. In other words, having a strand of crime in a novel does not and cannot qualify that novel as crime fiction. For instance one of the strands of South Africa's acclaimed novel, Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), follows the arrest and trial of a young black man, Absalom Kumalo for the murder of Arthur Jarvis. But then would that make Paton a crime or mystery writer? Absolutely not. Indeed as Palmer (1991) clearly puts it, "a story is labelled a crime story when it is clear that the portrayal of criminal activity is absolutely central to the nature of the story" (131). Like Paton's story, Bessie Head's "The Collector of Treasures" in The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales (1977), concerns the murder of a Motswana man Garesego by his wife Dikeledi. However, following Symons' and Palmer's argument the fact that Dikeledi is arrested, charged and jailed as a murderer would not make "The Collector of Treasures" a crime story because Head's major concern here is not Dikeledi's crime but Garesego's neglect of and irresponsibility for his family which then pushes his wife into murdering him. In other words Head's is a story on gender imbalances in rural Botswana and not crime.

In Kenyan literature, the same crime strands are a typical facet but still crime tends to be only a sub-theme within a larger theme in most of these literatures and is only used to put across an author's particular major concern. For example Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's Murder in Majengo (1972) and Victoria and Murder in Majengo (1993) despite their 'crime' titles are not crime stories but stories on urban prostitution in Kisumu's slum area, Majengo. In most of these Kenyan works, criminals are depicted as

societal misfits who paradoxically are almost justified to be criminals because they are driven into crime by economic constraints. The issue at hand in these postcolonial Kenyan works therefore is not crime *per se* but postcolonial disillusionment in which people like Meja and Maina in Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick (1973), despite being highly educated, cannot find employment or Zollo's criminal friend Captain in My Life in Crime, whose high level of education cannot secure him a 'proper' job. Even when he gets one, his job security is not assured: "with his education", Zollo says, "You would not have thought he could be a robber. He had lost three responsible jobs. Then he had thought it wise to try the other side of the law" (My Life in Crime, 21). To save the society from this menace of poor and disillusioned characters then, the supposed criminals end up in jail.

Similarly, like Meja and Maina, Dodge Kiunyu in the most acclaimed Kenyan popular novel, Charles Mangua's Son of Woman (1971) is so full of angst and fury that he adopts a 'hell-cares-what' attitude with which he cruises through the streets of Nairobi. At one point he is imprisoned for six months for a bungled robbery and for hitting a policeman in a Nanyuki Bar which consequently costs him his job at the Ministry of Labour and Social Services.[23] When Kiunyu goes to jail, one would blame him for defying a certain universal social and moral order since as Palmer (1991) asserts, "crime…represents one of the frontiers of society [and] to step into crime involves stepping beyond the bounds of a particular moral universe" (133). However although Jack Zollo, in Kiriamiti's My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison, is a criminal and as such a societal menace, who perhaps would, in real life, be 'necklaced' (lynched by use of a car tyre round the neck) by a Nairobi mob, Kiriamiti makes him so likeable such that even when he is "on the other side of the law" (My Life in Crime, blurb) the reader

[23], Charles Mangua, Son of Woman (1971).

(perhaps the same person who would lynch such a criminal in the streets) is exhilarated. Indeed, this is one of the defining features of the crime thriller because it is only by exhilarating the reader that the crime writer can win the reader to the hero's side. This is because the reader has "[to] believe that [the criminal hero] is justified [and has to be] free to enjoy the sensation of suppressing the obstacles that confront [the reader] and him [the hero]" (Palmer 1978:20). In other words the reader of the crime thriller must be an accomplice in the criminal activity because what is good for the criminal is good for the reader and vice versa. The reader becomes an accomplice in the crime by merely sympathizing or identifying with the criminal, according to John Lutz (1999). This is possible however only if the hero is by and large admirable to the reader or in Palmer's words if he is the only one with an "exclusive right to our [readers] admiration":

> It is only if he is the hero in this full sense that the action of the thriller will produce the excitement that the reader wants, for excitement and suspense derive from wholeheartedly wanting one person to succeed and fearing setbacks to their projects. (1978:62)

For example when Zollo is advised by his criminal friend and fellow inmate Stanley Githenji (G.G) to feign madness in prison (My Life in Prison, 15-16), the reader should be able to support him through this project. The reader is supposed to believe in the criminal because he is capable of anything: as a thriller hero he must succeed. When Zollo finally gets admission to the Mathare Mental Hospital as he wished, the reader should be exhilarated because his or her hero has added yet another escapade to his career. Similarly when Zollo goes out for a robbery, as a hero he must succeed and a slight sign of failure nauseates both the criminal and the reader. But then what is it that is so attractive in the fictional criminal to warrant Palmer's total admiration?

A useful starting-point for understanding the ways in which Kiriamiti achieves this (re)construction of the criminal figure would be to examine his style of writing. According to Simon Dentith (1990), style is important in crime writing because "it is at the level of style that the rhetorical appeal of [crime] writing becomes most apparent". Quoting Althusser–who introduced the idea of interpellation in criticism– Dentith argues that style interpellates the reader and hails him or her in specific ways (23). Dentith's is a relevant argument for the examination of Kiriamiti's (re)construction of the criminal figure because it is Kiriamiti's ability to interpellate the reader that makes Zollo a hero. Among the ways through which Kiriamiti interpellates his readers include the use of the first person narrator, humor, characterization and most importantly addressivity or what Stewart (1996) calls reader personification, just to mention but a few.

Both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison are told in the first person narrative voice. Like in most other Kenyan popular novels, when the reader first meets Jack Zollo in My Life in Crime, Zollo introduces himself by giving brief background information on himself and his family. However unlike Emily Katango, the prostitute protagonist, in David Maillu's After 4:30, and Dodge Kiunyu in Mangua's Son of Woman who are unapologetic about who they are, Zollo approaches the reader in a rather confessional and penitent way:

> Before my life in crime, I never believed that a man or group of people could sit together and conspire to rob, blackmail, kidnap, murder or commit other acts of felony. But now I know…the judge who sentenced me knew exactly what he was doing… I was born to a relatively well-to-do family. My father, Albert Kiriamiti, and my mother, Anne Wanjiru, were teachers, and therefore in my youth, I was well provided for. (My Life in Crime, 1)

In this introduction Zollo sets out to firstly seek audience with the reader and perhaps clear his name of his criminal past by admitting that he deserves his jail sentence. Secondly, Zollo starts off with claiming a higher social status by letting the reader know that he was born to a 'proper' and well-off family so poverty or socio-economic constraints are not the drive behind his criminal living. This encourages the reader to follow Zollo through the story in order to find out his reason for being in the criminal world.

Clearly, the introduction of *I* in the opening paragraph of the story signals first person narration. Unlike in the detective crime story in which the point of view with which the reader is presented is that of the detective, police or a third person narrator, in Kiriamiti's quasi-autobiographical crime stories the story is told from the criminal's point of view. If the detective crime story uses a second or third person's point of view in its narration therefore, what would be the impact on the reading public when the story is narrated from the criminal's point of view and whose point of view is countered in this representation? In other words what possibilities does the use of the criminal narrator offer a writer that he otherwise would not have achieved in a different narrative voice?

According to Garrett Stewart (1996), first person narrative voice turns the reader into the novel's protagonist and no matter how bad or good the protagonists may be the reader becomes them (10). Although the reader may not actually become the protagonist as Stewart asserts, the reader's judgment of the protagonist is greatly altered by the voice of narration because s/he becomes a 'silent voice' in a dialogue between the protagonist and him/herself (the reader). Immediately the protagonist

introduces himself as *I*, the reader becomes the implied *you* of the conversation (a point to which we shall return). In other words, the reader does not only underwrite communication in the text but is actually conscripted by the narrative as what Stewart refers to as a silent partner (1996:10).

The reader becomes the silent partner through a number of ways one of which is the earlier noted use of *you*. This in itself is a moment of interpellation because Kiriamiti directly speaks to the reader not as part of some implied or imagined audience but as someone who willingly steps forward to identify himself/ herself as his reader. For instance while hiding in Congo Zollo comes across a Kikuyu family that runs a shop in Congo's interior:

> Then I heard him [the Kikuyu man] call the woman, '*Wambui indo ni ciaga*.' That is to say, 'Wambui, I could not get the items.' Well, *you* can imagine my surprise. People speaking Kikuyu in the interior of Congo! (My Life in Crime, 122; emphasis mine)

The use of *you* in the passage quoted above directly puts the reader in an audience position because if Zollo is the *I* of the story, whoever is reading his story is the *you*. It is towards him or her that the address is made. However, besides Kiriamiti's use of *you* to refer to the reader, two assumptions arise from the passage quoted above. Firstly, Kiriamiti is writing for whoever is willing to read, thus although he is establishing a 'one-on-one' relationship with the reader, the latter still remains distant and unknown to him, a reason for which perhaps he translates the Gikuyu part in the passage into English. Secondly, he is assuming that the reader is aware that it would be strange, in what one would refer to as normal circumstances, to find Gikuyu speakers at least in the interior of Congo. In this case, the reader is expected and assumed to know certain

'truths' about both Kikuyus and Congo. Otherwise if the reader was not expected to know these 'truths' he or she would not imagine the cause of surprise when Zollo hears someone speak in Gikuyu in Congo. In other words, the reader is put at a high level of knowledge or knowingness which, according to Dentith, is one of the ways through which crime writers interpellate their readers (1990:23). Once the writer has invited the reader to adopt such a position of superior knowingness (in Dentith's words), the reader feels obliged to be on the protagonist's (in this case the criminal's) side. Since both the reader and the criminal share some common knowledge, the reader then is invited to follow the criminal through his adventures and conquests.

Additionally, Kiriamiti uses *you* to 'pull' the reader to Zollo's side by occasionally making the former the 'good guy' and Zollo outrightly the 'bad guy'. For example, when he is at the dock at the Nairobi Law Courts, Zollo's mind wanders into his life and the mock courts that he and other remandees had had at the remand prison as a rehearsal for his judgment day. Zollo gets so absorbed into his mock court such that he forgets that he is in a 'real' court with a similarly real judge:

> I was lost in all that misery when I heard the judge say, "If you have nothing to say…" Put *yourself* in my place, though *you* have never been a robber, and tell me what *you* would have said. I said nothing. I knew I was guilty. (My Life in Prison, 4; emphasis mine)

This is such a moment of interpellation in which Zollo admits that he is the evil one and the reader is 'cleansed' of any evil-doing by the certainty with which Zollo posits that the reader has never been a robber. The reader has limited options besides liking Zollo despite his owning up to crime because of the latter's valorization of the former.

Besides the use of *you*, Kiriamiti's narratives oscillate between referring to the reader as *brother* and directly calling upon the reader not only by implication but by literally referring to him as *reader*. For instance, when he escapes from Congo for fear of facing the consequences of impregnating both his boss's daughter, Hellene and secretary, Elizabeth, Zollo tells of how much he wants to be in Kenya despite the fact that he is still on the police's 'most wanted' list. The only way that Zollo can get to Kenya, however, is by first getting some Kenyan currency since he is now stranded in Rwanda with only Congolese francs which are of little help. It is in the narration of this desperation for Kenyan currency that he asks:

> *Do you, the reader, pick anything there? If you don't, then you have not been following my story.* I badly wanted to find myself back in Kenya where I had run away from some months back, and where I was wanted by the police. (My Life in Crime, 148; emphasis mine)

By directly marking or singling out his audience as one particular reader, Kiriamiti not only shows his conscious implication of a reading public but also demands a certain level of reader loyalty. The reader is expected and even obliged by Zollo, the narrator, to follow him throughout his story. Failure for the reader to understand Zollo's predicament in the passage quoted would be interpreted to be a sign of disloyalty. Clearly, Kiriamiti is aware that the conversation is not only between him as a writer and his implied reader, but also between the reader and the chief protagonist, Zollo. According to Stewart (1996), this narrativization of the reader serves to remind him that he is not a listener to a story but rather an individual isolated with a text. The reader is displaced, in such a narrativization, "from his immediate reading to [a] depicted site of narrative consumption" (Stewart 1996:15). In this way, the story is not only evacuating the reader but also its characters from the text and both have to relate in a particular way outside the text. Once this is done, then the writer and the reader can "move along

together in full confidence with each other" (Booth 1978:206, quoted in Stewart 1996:15). This implies a contradiction in Kiriamiti's novels in which there appears to be two texts within a single story. First, there is a text that exists between the author and the reader and a second text between the protagonist and the reader. Kiriamiti wins the reader's confidence then by the mere recognition of the reader as just that (a reader) and nominalizing him or her in 'reading' Zollo as a hero.

Besides the singular reader already identified in his texts, Kiriamiti similarly uses the plural *readers*. This serves the same evacuation mission in which the relationship between the reader and the writer is established through the text that connects them. For example when Zollo is arrested on the eve of his wedding to Milly, he says:

> Well, *readers* when you hear me talk of the eleventh or the twenty-third hour, that is what I mean. *You* have now seen it. The next day was to have been the biggest day I had ever had, the day when I was to be united in church by a Catholic father to the girl I really loved; the day that I was to have remembered all my life with a touch of tenderness. Now at the eleventh hour, it had turned contrary to that and I would spend the day in a police cell where I would undergo a hell of tortures. (My Life in Crime, 209; my emphasis)

The other important factor in Kiriamiti's interpellation of the reader is what would be referred to as the individual personification of the reader. Individual personification of the reader here is used to refer to the author's ability to concretize the reader so that s/he becomes known (and at times related) to both the narrator and the writer. Kiriamiti personifies the reader at three different levels. Firstly, the reader is personified by the mere fact that he is referred to as a *brother* to/by the protagonist. The use of *brother* to refer to an imagined reader clearly leads to certain inferences in Kiriamiti's works. Once

he has moved from addressing just anyone volunteering to be a reader and resorted to addressing a *brother*, Kiriamiti (and Zollo) is certainly speaking to or writing for a male reader. This aspect of a male writer addressing a male reader is significant in the reading and interpretation of the Kenyan urban novel in general. According to Granqvist (2004; 2006) the urban novel in Kenya is masculine because the city is in itself a 'masculinized' space. The novel assumes both a masculine inhabitant of the city and therefore a masculine reader and when a female is introduced, she can only be the other (Granqvist 2004:95). Resultantly therefore it is not unusual for the male author creating a male protagonist to assume a male readership. For example when Zollo and his gang rob a white man on his way to the bank, although Zollo celebrates the success of the robbery, he has some 'brotherly advice' for his reader:

> After a few minutes I was back in my apartment Shs. 21,000.00 richer. *Brother, to get money is tough, but to spend it is quite another story. Robbery is very risky*. Drinking the whole day and doing other big things immediately after you get the cash is another risk but most criminals don't realize it and never will. (My Life in Crime, 55; my emphasis)

In fact whenever Zollo calls the reader *brother* he establishes some sort of 'man talk' (to use Oyunga Pala's (in)famous column title)[24] in which he gives fellow men hints not only on crime but also in other matters of life like what things men should know about women. Although the male reader is at times only implied, Kiriamiti is undeniably addressing a male audience and whatever his protagonist says is meant for 'male ears'. For example, in this passage, Kiriamiti is clearly assuming a male readership:

> One thing I had learned was that, if you wanted your wife or your girlfriend to be faithful to you always you had to buy a present, every now and then, no matter how small provided it was a present, and then

[24] Oyunga Pala is a Kenyan columnist in the Saturday edition of the newspaper Daily Nation known for his humorous, but ironic, masculinist ideas about women, http://nationmedia/Saturday Magazine.com.

> you would count on her to wish to be near you every minute. She'd love you more than her own eyes. (My Life in Crime, 156)

Once the criminal has declared the reader his *brother* and positioned himself as his brother's advisor, the reader then will find himself identifying with the criminal because of the relationship established thereof.

Similarly, Zollo at times personifies the reader as *friend* which has the same effect on the reader as when the reader is called a *brother*. This interlocutory directness obliges the reader-cum-friend to have confidence in the criminal protagonist. For instance Zollo meets an old criminal friend of his in prison, Ramadhani Mwangi (an odd combination of names, Zollo says, "but a Kikuyu alright") who once worked for a motor vehicle company. Mwangi, Zollo tells us, unfortunately lost his job after he stole a huge sum of money from his employer. After losing his job Mwangi then turns to crime because

> [F]rom a place like that, where one is used to big money, the usual place to turn to when one runs broke is the other side of the law. This other side has plenty of quick money…but, *my dear friend*, it is hard-earned and can easily lead to death! (My Life in Prison, 146; emphasis mine)

What does it mean for the reader to be called "my dear friend"? According to Stewart (1996) in "dearing the reader" the novelist conscripts or interpolates the reader with cues to attention (137). The reader in this case becomes not only a friend but also an accomplice in crime thus the criminal and himself (the reader) move together in confidence.

However, the narrative voice and the writer's address of the reader only would not really appeal to the latter so much as to make him or her follow Zollo throughout his endeavors in Nairobi, Naivasha and even Congo if Kiriamiti did not make Zollo such an entertaining character. There are several ways through which the protagonist in the crime thriller can win admiration from the reader besides the already identified first person narrative voice and interlocutory directness. Other ways through which the criminal hero is made admirable and which I will discuss in the pages that follow, include humour, irony and the hero's professionalism.

For the reader to be entertained by the story and to actually adopt the perspective of the heroic protagonist, Palmer (1978) says, s/he must enjoy the (thriller) story and his or her enjoyment of the story depends on how it is told. Humor is among the many ways through which the crime story or thriller can be enjoyed. In a different context, Palmer (1994) in his paradoxically entitled book, Taking Humour Seriously defines humour as "everything that is actually or potentially funny, and the processes by which this 'funniness' occurs" (3). In his definition of humour Palmer identifies two crucial elements of humour: the object of laughter and what he calls the laugher or the perceiver. It is only after these two have interacted that a situation may be termed humorous. In other words, the laugher must have something to laugh at depending on the situation or context of the laughter.

The object of laughter or humour, as Alison Ross (1998) observes in The Language of Humour, could be a person, an institution or even a set of beliefs (7). It could be added here, however, that a situation could also be a target of humour in the crime thriller. As grievous as his criminal endeavors in both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison may

be, Zollo manages to tell his story with a touch of humour or comic relief which then shows his heroic triumph over his otherwise dreadful situation(s). For instance when Zollo and several other convicts are brought to the Nairobi Law Courts for the mentioning and hearing of their cases and put in remand prison, Zollo describes this rather serious part of his story quite humorously:

> In remand prison we were very poorly fed, but I could see from the warder's face that his life wasn't a picnic either. I felt I would rather be employed as a grave digger than look for a job as a warder. I've never met a warder who is proud of his work all these years I have been with them. Every time I hear them talk of retiring soon. But when the time comes, each one starts praying for an additional two or three years of service, for one reason or the other. I suppose their job is as addictive as crime is to some criminals. (My Life in Prison, 1)

Although perhaps Zollo's point here is to mock his greatest enemies (state agents of law and order) and their job, his humorous attitude cannot go unnoticed. In another incident while in prison, during his usual rehearsals in preparation to gain admission to an asylum, Zollo says:

> At one corner I noticed a round plastic bowl, the kind that was used in this world as a toilet, a kind of crude chamber pot. I instructed my hand to go to my head and find out what was going on there. I felt some water flowing down my cheek and tried to lift my hand to investigate. My hand did not move. The tongue let me know, by the salty taste of the liquid that I was weeping… My whole body seemed to have been beaten into soft pulp. (My Life in Prison, 8)

Perhaps the reader would expect Zollo to be distraught about such an experience but instead Zollo decides to 'tell the truth laughingly' (to borrow the words of John Ruganda, 1992). According to Ross (1999), humour is a product of the ambiguous

relationship between what is expected and what actually happens (7). It is this use of humour that actually makes Zollo such an admirable character who is not broken by his situation but instead seems to celebrate every moment. Resultantly, the reader is hardly welcome or allowed by Zollo to condemn him. It should be noted here however that humor is a slippery subject which is quite subjective and personal. What might be humorous to one person may not be considered as such by another. Nevertheless, whichever definition and description that may be accorded humour in this chapter, Kiriamiti's use of the same in his works goes a long way in (re)constructing Zollo as the reader's heroic villain.

Kiriamiti's use of humour in the crime thriller couples up with a lot of irony. According to Martin Edwards in his analysis of Finnish crime fiction, irony tends to be incidental rather than central to most modern crime novels. Nevertheless, whenever crime writers use irony, Edwards argues, their works can still be read with enjoyment, as well as the occasional frisson of surprise.[25] In Kiriamiti's works however, although irony is not central to his work, it cannot be termed as incidental because Zollo's situation, in most cases, can only be depicted ironically for him to be the reader's hero. For instance, Zollo narrates a conversation between inmates and the prison chief, Kagi, in which the former launch complaints over poor feeding in prison. The whole situation is captured in such black humour that Zollo borders on sarcasm. Zollo says:

> When we complained that many of us were losing our sight, he [Kagi] asked very politely, "When you are eating your food, can you see the bowl?" Not knowing what he was driving at, you gave a frank answer, "yes, Sir". "Okay, what else do you want? Do you want to see Zambia

[25] Martin Edwards, "The Irony of Murder". Available at http://www.martinedwardsbooks.com/irony.htm.

> from here?"…Another inmate saw him near the drum where the stew was being served. Taking his share, the inmate went up to him and said, "But Sir, can't you see that this stew is very watery?" …"What do you mean? Do you people want rocks?" (My Life in Prison, 128-129)

In the thriller, Palmer (1978) claims, irony has three functions. Firstly it is part of the worldly wisdom that enables the hero to be nobody's fool. Secondly, it increases the density of the novel's texture and finally it is an indication of moral sensibility (80). What Palmer actually means is that the ambiguity created by irony increases the complexity of both the hero and the thriller. On irony as an indication of moral sensibility, Palmer says that irony shows the hero's ability to judge other people, an intrinsic ability that Zollo possesses. In the passage above, for example, Zollo is able to ironically show the reader Kagi's cruelty. This is in itself very ironic because Zollo himself does not want to depict his criminal endeavors as immoral. He becomes the reader's hero therefore because he is able to pit other people as immoral thus the reader is not allowed to judge him (Zollo).

Finally, Kiriamiti manages to (re)construct Zollo's criminal figure by mere characterization. By characterization, here I mean both the presentation of the criminal hero before and beyond the reader. How do other characters in the texts view Jack Zollo? As a hero, Zollo is supposed to rise above other characters. For instance, he must be the gang leader, he must have the final word on who and who does not join the gang for a robbery and he should also be responsible for allocation of duties during robberies (My Life in Crime, 49). In his gang whether in the 'free' world or in prison, to be a hero, Zollo must be the best; he must be professional. In prison, for instance, Zollo is the sole inmate who manages to form a syndicate that finally overthrows prison authorities.

Resultantly, he gains popularity not only with fellow inmates but also with prison authorities (My Life in Prison, 172). The hero must have a solution to any problem or obstacle that arises in the 'course of duty'. This capacity to deal with any situation that arises is part of the hero's professionalism (Palmer 1978:78). His professionalism then wins the hero admiration by other characters as well as by the reader.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to identify features of the crime story and discussed what qualifies a story as a crime story and what disqualifies other stories from this category even when they seem to advance themes which appear to be 'criminal' in nature. For a story to be a crime story, I have argued, it has to have crime as its central focus and not only as a strand within a larger thematic concern. Secondly, in my analysis of Kiriamiti's creation of a hero out of a villain, I have attempted to highlight such writing techniques as the choice of narrative voice, deployment of humour and characterization all of which, I argue, Kiriamiti deploys to interpellate his readers. As the journalist-turned-spy novelist, Valentine Williams, postulates, what ultimately matters in thriller-writing is plausibility or verisimilitude because it is not what the reader believes that counts but "the important aim is to make him believe it" (1935; quoted in Glover 2003: 137). Once the reader has believed in the criminal-hero, then the latter is cleansed of his crime and his becomes what I would call a robbery without crime.

In the next Chapter I will seek to examine the criminal's ability to write himself into certain urban spaces thus giving those spaces meanings that are not always available to the 'ordinary' city dweller. To achieve this, I contrast Kiriamiti's representation of Nairobi through the criminal figure *vis-à-vis* other prominent Kenyan urban novelists,

for example Charles Mangua, Meja Mwangi and Leonard Kibera. Although I do not intend to comparatively study Kiriamiti's works, I believe that this comparison is important in this study because only then can we start to view Kiriamiti's representation of the city as different. I will examine Jack Zollo's use and personalization of such spaces as the bar, the prison and certain urban neighbourhoods.

CHAPTER THREE

"THIS IS NAIROBI:" UNRAVELING THE CITY'S UNDERBELLY

> From Lari to Kangemi to Embakasi, Nairobi sprawls. From Buruburu to Githurai and Kasarani, Nairobi rolls. From Lavington to Mathare and Kariobangi, Nairobi smothers a splitting headache whose victims must visit Mathare Mental Hospital and spill into the busy street of the city, which must stay clean. From State House to City Centre, Nairobi rests her head. From Karen to Muthaiga, Nairobi tells of the whiteness of her veins. From Dandora to Riruta, Congo and Kawangware, she bares her muscles as the mother of thieves and armed robbers. In Parklands and Eastleigh, she hides her pockets – the machinery of trade–, which leaks into another bottomless pocket far away where her hungry children may not dirty them with their eager hands. (Genga-Idowu, F.M, Lady in Chains, 60-61)

In this long passage, Genga-Idowu draws not only the map of Nairobi as a divided city but also sets out to expose the various meanings which have been inscribed on the urban space–whether in terms of economic (im)mobility or cultural-cum-occupational differences–by the people inhabiting the various quarters of the city. This kind of mapping of the city clearly echoes Henri Lefebvre's much quoted postulation that "space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations" (quoted in Granqvist 2004:15).[26] Lefebvre's claim here is that space is coded by human encounters as much as it dictates these encounters. In other words both space and social relations produce and are

[26] See also Michel de Certeau. "Walking the City". The Practice of Everyday Life (1984).

products of each other. For instance, places such as Karen and Muthaiga in their telling of "the whiteness of [their] veins", have become synonymous not only to wealthy Europeans (literally white) living within them but also the black élite urban class in Kenya. On the contrary, Nairobi's poorer estates starting from Dandora through Kawangware have come to be characterized by criminal activities going by Genga-Idowu's description of the urban space. But then what is the relevance of Genga-Idowu's mapping of Nairobi in the current study of Kiriamiti's works? Like most other urban novelists, for example, Charles Mangua, Mwangi Ruheni, and Meja Mwangi among others, Genga-Idowu's mapping of the city is only descriptive. For instance, Dandora, Riruta, Congo and Kawangware are described as the "mother of thieves and armed robbers" but Genga-Idowu does not reveal more than that neither does she substantiate her claims. What makes Kiriamiti's city mapping different is the fact that he takes the reader into those areas that have only been described by others. In a way, Kiriamiti reveals to the reader the city's underworld not by merely describing certain urban spaces as unsafe but revealing the activities of the criminal figure within those spaces. Through Jack Zollo's walk through Nairobi, Kiriamiti gives the reader an explanation as to why certain areas are associated with specific activities and not others.

Following Lefebvre's and De Certeau's argument on the city as a coded space therefore, this chapter focuses on the criminal's coding of or rather the criminal's ability to mark certain spaces/ quarters of the city, particularly Nairobi with his criminal activities. Are there specific areas in the city within which the criminal operates? What makes those areas more suitable than others for the criminal's activities? If the same urban spaces are shared by other city inhabitants, how different or similar is the criminal's utilization of the same spaces? The main concern here is how the criminal takes the reader through his own creation of the city space that only he (the criminal) knows about. The central

argument that this chapter advances is that the criminal has a certain level of knowledge about the city that is inaccessible to the 'ordinary' city dweller. Although he may share the same urban space with other people, the criminal has a way of personalizing that public space so that it serves a different purpose from that of other urbanites utilizing the same space.

This discussion begins from a rather historical premise as a means of demonstrating what is at stake in the criminal's 'privatization' of public urban space and the representation of the criminal's city in general. It is important that a historical background of Nairobi and its fictional representation is given in order to take a closer look at Kiriamiti's representation of the same. To begin with, what is known as Nairobi today was founded as a depot round about May 1899 during the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway when the railhead is believed to have reached *Enkari* (the place of cold waters).[27] Up until Kenya's independence in 1963, colonial Nairobi was planned along racial lines with Europeans, Indians (a term that, in East Africa, refers to all people of South Asian origin, from Bangladesh to Bhutan)[28] and Africans living in separate quarters of the city. As was the case in most other colonial African states, in Nairobi, Africans were the lowest and most disadvantaged in this 'sandwich' thus they inhabited the poorest parts of the city which were actually regulated by the colonial administration. Economic development, similarly, followed the same racial hierarchy with the British being the richest followed by the Asians and then the Africans who were basically labourers and minimum wage earners (Odhiambo 2005:40).

[27] See Raoul Granqvist, The Bulldozer and the Word: Culture at Work in Postcolonial Nairobi (2004:11) and Roger Kurtz, Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel (1998:4).

[28] See among others Dan Ojwang, "Writing Migrancy and Ethnicity: The Politics of Identity in East African Indian Literature" (2004) for further discussion on the nuances of the Indian/ Asian definition.

According to Tom Odhiambo (2005), owing to official deprivation and the government policy of non-settlement for Africans in Nairobi, "the city became an ambiguous space; offering opportunities for socio-economic survival and improvement but also projecting an alien environment" (41). The ambivalence of the city, identified by Odhiambo above, is one of its most intriguing characteristics whether in fiction or in real life. How does the city become so promising yet so discouraging? In fact for the new African arrivals in the city, the place became home yet it gave them a strong sense of homelessness. The city was never 'home' (in the sense of the word) for the black Africans in colonial Kenya because they were not allowed to settle there by the colonial government and therefore it only became a place of work while their respective 'reserves' defined home. In Odhiambo's words, the city was "the unknown place – full of possibilities for material wealth, economic betterment, chances for social progress, while at the same time standing for the unknowable future" (2005:41).

With the transition from colonialism to independence however, the city (Particularly Nairobi because before 2002 when Mombasa and Kisumu acquired city status, Nairobi was the only city in Kenya) became open to Africans most of whom moved from their rural homes to the city *en masse* with the hope and intention of capturing the possibilities that –they believed– the city offered them. Resultantly, the annual population growth of Nairobi by 1969, Granqvist (2004) records, had increased by about 10%, "making the city swell both inside and outside its former boundaries" (27). It is this Nairobi and its maelstroms that became and continues to be the subject and object of postcolonial Kenyan literature.

The city has significantly been the focus of the postcolonial Kenyan novel for more than the past three decades. In fact, the postcolonial novel in Kenya, Roger Kurtz (1998) argues, in his rather descriptive work on Kenyan fiction, Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel, is primarily an urban one. Kurtz traces what he calls "emphasis on [and fascination with] the city" in Kenyan literature from the publication of Leonard Kibera's Voices in the Dark (1970) through the 1980s and 1990s. According to Kurtz, "a significant majority of the novels published in Kenya since 1970… include a wide variety of adventures, romances, crime and detective stories [in the city]"(93). What clearly emerges in most of these novels however is that Nairobi is a city of suffering where people struggle through life as street urchins, prostitutes or petty criminals when all is lost. For example Kibera's pioneer work focuses on (besides its protagonist Gerald Timundu) the "lonely boy" who is described as "barefooted, ragged and able,…the kind that bored policemen take as a specimen of disorder" (Voices in the Dark 1970:101). In fact this image of Kibera's "lonely boy" has become what one would call a typical representation of the average Nairobi dweller in the Kenyan urban novel. In other words, Nairobi appears in these literatures as a place of what Odhiambo (2005) calls "urban misadventures" (50). Urban misadventures, Odhiambo says, result from "an unending series of unfulfilled expectations" (2005: 50); that is, they are an outcome of an adventure gone sour or what one would call reversed adventures.

Odhiambo's "unfulfilled expectations" are characteristic of the city not only in Kenyan literature but also literatures from elsewhere in the world. In her critical analysis of Victorian fiction, The Celebration of Scandal: Toward the Sublime in Victorian Urban Fiction, Carol Bernstein argues that the city is such an oxymoron that its representation in fiction can only be scandalous because it is "an excrescence in nature, gigantic and

unclassified [and its] recognition … requires a direct address that halts and cuts across the path of narrative" (1991:1). Citing literatures of the dandy character in Victorian fiction as an example, Bernstein claims that even the urban sublime, which in essence celebrates the city, records the urban experience in its ambiguity, negativity and its strength (2). Clearly therefore, from Odhiambo's and Bernstein's postulations, the city is indeed characterized by an undeniable degree of ambiguity and convolution.

Most of Meja Mwangi's novels (especially his applauded Nairobi-trilogy of Kill Me Quick, 1973; Going Down River Road, 1976 and The Cockroach Dance, 1986) are such a representation of Nairobi primarily characterized by Odhiambo's urban misadventures. In fact, Kurtz (1998) claims that Mwangi's three novels listed above have become what he calls, "a paradigm for the exposure of Nairobi's urban underbelly" (5). In Kill Me Quick for instance, Maina and Meja, the novel's two main characters, leave their rural village to go to Nairobi in search of employment but since *'Hakuna Kazi'* (no employment) has become the language of the postcolonial Kenyan city even for the educated, the two boys end up in the streets of Nairobi where they eat from garbage bins and pits. Eventually both boys end up in jail for petty crime and vagrancy into which they resort as a means of survival in the controversial urban space or to appropriate Kibera's words, they are actually taken by the police as a "specimen of disorder" (1970:101). This disillusionment and despondency is captured in Maina's words when he says:

> I came out here raw and proud the way you are. I thought I would get a job and earn six hundred shillings a month. Then I would get a house, a radio, good clothes and good food. Well, I tried to get a job. "What qualifications?" they would ask me. "Second Division School Cert…" I would start to say but before I had finished the man behind the desk would roar, "Get out, we have no jobs". (Kill Me Quick, 1)

Similarly, when Ben and Ocholla come to Nairobi in search of employment in Going Down River Road, they go through the same urban misadventures although they luckily secure employment as construction workers at Development House. However, their kind of work does not pay much and they can only manage to 'survive' which in principle entails living in slums, going hungry almost always and turning to *karara* and women for solace and comfort. In fact, the quality of life that these two live could only be described in the same lowly terms as the *karara* they drink:

> …a home-made 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 a Pilsner and a quarter the price of any of the best scotch whiskys…That stuff is slow poison. It is such slow poison Ben does not remember one person who was killed by it. (Going Down River Road, 58, 103)

According to Werner Graebner (1992) however, although the protagonists in Mwangi's novels are amongst the most unlucky urbanites in Nairobi, "Mwangi never sinks into sentimental melancholy, rather he often uses irony, marking situations and characters with his special brand of black humor" (135). For instance although the condition of both the place and people at Karara Centre depicts some kind of hopelessness, Mwangi captures that bleakness in such a humorous manner that instead of sympathizing with the characters, the reader is actually entertained by their situation:

> Next stop Karara Centre. One drink, and then home to Baby. Only one drink... Karara Centre is one of the very few places in town where it's fun all month. The beer is cheaper, the air warmer, stuffier, more friendly. There are a few drunks sleeping at various tables. As a token to the bad times, no one in sight drinks Pilsner or Tusker or any factory brew. They are all on Karara. Just the thing for a murderous hangover. (Going Down River Road, 103)

Interestingly, it is striking–not only in Mwangi's novels but those of other Kenyan urban writers–that no matter how much the characters seem to suffer and struggle in the city, they do not leave the urban space. Although most of these characters are immigrants from their rural homes into the city they would rather face the city's uncertainty than go back to their villages. They are what Dusman in The Cockroach Dance calls "urban Africans".[29] According to Graebner (1992), these urban Africans are bound to live in the city because "life in the village is no longer possible nor is it considered to be an alternative to life in town" (149).

Nevertheless, for the criminal figure, life in the city is an alloy of both adventure and misadventure. The city presents to the criminal an opportunity for adventure and material mobility. According to Gunther Barth (1999) it is the anonymity and peril of the city that are attractive to writers who concentrate on the reality of crime. "The basic matter of crime", Barth argues, "arises as a subject in literature together with the social and cultural complexity of the modern city" (474). In fact the urban crime story begins with the initial entrance of the criminal (or would-be criminal) into the city. Kiriamiti, for instance begins My Life in Crime with details on Zollo's arrival at Nairobi:

> In 1963 after I had passed my K.A.P.E. I went to St Mary's Secondary School in Murang'a town. I never liked the school and before the end of my first year, I applied for a place at New Nairobi High School later renamed St. Mark's High School. I did not care what kind of a school it was, all I wanted was to be in Nairobi. If only I knew Nairobi would turn me into a helpless person I would have hated the look of it for good as I now do. (My Life in Crime, 1)

[29] When he is arrested by the police at a point in his city escapades, Dusman completely refuses to give details of his original (read: rural) home and maintains that his home is in the city. He says: "My home is in Dacca House, Grogan Road. Haven't you guys ever heard of an urban African? I am one!" (335).

The would-be criminal is so fascinated with the city and although he cannot tell why exactly he wants to be there, the city beckons him and against all odds, he enters into its realm never to exit. Once the criminal has entered the city he cannot leave because that is the ontological plane within which the story and the criminal's actions revolve. At certain times however, the criminal may leave the city either as a 'body on the run' (to borrow from Granqvist)[30] or when he is under arrest. But even then, the city and its memories become a valve through which the criminal vents his fears and hopes as he maneuvers ways of re-entering the urban space. In other words, the city becomes significant to the criminal by its absence. Zollo's greatest survival tactic in prison, for example, is his continued fascination with and admiration of his conquests in the city. He relentlessly tells other inmates of his escapades in Nairobi and how celebrated and respected a criminal he was by both friends and foe. Away from the city therefore, the criminal's major challenge becomes that of getting back into the city. For example, when Zollo is expelled from school and his parents decide that the best punishment would be to repatriate him to the village[31], for the criminal's story to be told, Kiriamiti has to bring Zollo back into the city.

> I came to a conclusion that even if I went home, I would go back to Nairobi with or without their [his parents'] consent…When time came for reopening schools, I was among the group that boarded the bus at Thuita Shopping Centre…And within two hours I was back in Nairobi. (My Life in Crime, 5)

[30] According to Granqvist (2004), "bodies on the run" characterize most of the Kenyan popular novels in the Spear Books category. These bodies, Granqvist claims, comprise such people as prostitutes, criminals and other city dwellers criss-crossing the urban space either running away from or after something. In this sense the criminal is such a 'body on the run' particularly when he is running away from "the long arm of the law", as Zollo calls the police (My Life in Prison, 58).

[31] In most Kenyan novels, the city is represented as a place of evil while the rural area is pure and uncorrupt. Often therefore once a character has been corrupted by the city his or her salvation and cleansing is only attained if s/he is deported to the village. See Nici Nelson, "Representation of Men and Women, City and Town in Kenyan Novels of the 1970s and 1980s" in, Stephanie Newell (Ed), Readings in African Popular Fiction (2002).

Similarly, when he flees to Congo, Zollo has to find a way of getting back to Nairobi because that is where the action is for him; it is his zone of operation. In fact as if to prove a sort of relationship between Nairobi and crime, in Congo Zollo does not engage in crime but works as a chauffeur for the Greek millionaire, Stephano. This is the only time throughout Zollo's criminal life that he actually earns his wages outside crime. Despite the fact that on the day that he leaves Congo he gets away with his boss' 1.5M Congolese Francs, Zollo confesses that the motive behind his action is not by any means criminal. In a letter addressed to Stephano, Zollo explains that he needs the money to get out of Congo because both Elizabeth Makarios (Stephano's secretary) and Hellene (Stephano's daughter) are pregnant by him and have threatened him with suicide: "I have run off with over a million francs…Believe me or not, I wouldn't have touched a single franc had it not been for your daughter and your secretary" (My Life in Crime, 137). But then perhaps one would ask what this kind of relationship between Nairobi and crime speaks of the criminal's preference for particular areas and not others. This connection between Nairobi and Zollo's criminal activities is rather intriguing for me because it speaks to my initial hypothesis that the criminal has certain specific milieux within which he operates and not others.

Although sometimes he is distraught and helpless in the city for lack of money just like most other urbanites, Nairobi is for Jack Zollo a place of open possibilities where he creates unimaginable survival networks and where he ultimately acquires a certain degree of what would be referred to as 'on-and-off' material success. Before he can land a 'good job', Zollo lives like any other low-class Nairobi dweller, but always with his head held high never to do anything that would taint his stature as a high profile urbanite, struggling to make ends meet until he finds his way to the next big job. Indeed, Zollo's life is as ambivalent as the city in which he operates as the city opens

itself up both as a utopia and a dystopia. In her examination of Hood movies in American cinema, Paula Massood (1996) argues that the city is a space that promises to the characters freedom and economic mobility while at the same time exhibiting high levels of economic impoverishment and segregation (85).

Unlike other city entrants like Meja, Maina, Ben and Ocholla who do not seem to have a 'successful' way of meeting up the challenges with which city life comes –other than alcoholism, sex and vagrancy– Zollo and his criminal friends always have a way of sorting themselves out of these city challenges without desperation. For the criminal figure the city is a place of opportunity not just in theory and imagination but an opportunity that must be practically seized. For instance when Zollo sneaks back into Nairobi from his rural home in Thuita, the city opens up survival opportunities for him after he is introduced to pick pocketing by his new found friend Wanjau:

> So, now here I was back in Nairobi and on my own, but this time with a different occupation. I was now a pick pocket under instructions. I had so far managed to pick the pockets of about six people and had got away with about Shs. 1,500.00 which I had shared with Wanjau. He himself was, of course, a professional and I, only an amateur. (My Life in Crime, 15)

Clearly, there are numerous opportunities for the criminal to pull through life in the city. He will not bend as low as other city dwellers to eat from garbage pits but instead will always pick someone's pocket or break into a 'carelessly-parked' car to survive despite the risks involved. In fact these crimes, into which Zollo delves, are positively described as his struggle to survive in the city against the forces of the law: "This spell-

binding story takes the reader into the underground of crime, and it depicts graphically the criminal's struggle for survival against the forces of law" (My Life in Crime, blurb).[32]

Among other reasons, the criminal is at an advantage over other city dwellers because of his ability to traverse space which allows him possibilities that are otherwise inaccessible to the 'ordinary' city inhabitant. The thesis here is that the criminal has the license and authority to move into and out of almost any urban space provided structures of law and order are not properly erected in that particular space partly because he plans the city space. Although the question of the criminal as what one would call an urban planner may be quite controversial it bears a lot of weight in this discussion because the criminal actively (dis)orders the urban space. Argumentatively, the criminal is an urban planner because, up to a certain level, however limited, what (where) most people do (go) in the city is partly predetermined by the criminal figure. For instance, the criminal has the power to dictate where people can(not) go and at what time by making certain city quarters literally 'unsafe' for other urbanites.

Unlike the ordinary city dweller who cannot cruise the city space freely for fear of being a victim of crime, the criminal has the freedom to cross boundaries from the ghettos/slums to the rich suburbs –natural city markers of economic and social boundaries in most Kenyan urban novels.[33] Ironically, those living in the rich city quarters are reluctant to go into the slums for fear of the criminal thus limiting their ability to cruise and experience the city in totality whilst on the other hand the criminal is not harbored by city boundaries thus enjoying a certain level of freedom that other

[32] See also Granqvist (2004: 106)

[33] See Granqvist (2004), particularly Chapter 2, for a discussion on Nairobi as a divided city.

city dwellers have no access to. For example, Zollo can go literally anywhere within Nairobi even into those spaces that are most dreaded by other urbanites since it is because of the criminal that such places are not accessible to others besides the criminals themselves. As Zollo claims, the criminal has the 'licence' to go anywhere within the city space without restrictions:

> I didn't bother…as I knew that, in a short time, the town would be mine to explore once again; to cross the streets any time I pleased and go anywhere I chose… (My Life in Prison, 205)

If the city can (and does) at times belong to the criminal, then the criminal is at a position to know that which belongs to him, the city, better than any ordinary city walker. For instance, when Zollo finds a car parked outside the Nyanza Bar in Nairobi's downtown, he immediately concludes that the owner must be new in Nairobi or simply does not understand how Nairobi operates because that part of Nairobi is not the safest for parking:

> At the far corner of the road, I saw a car with brown mud on its body. Whoever had parked it there was new in Kenya and was probably searching for a lodging, or had left it there unaware of how Nairobi operated. (My Life in Crime, 35)

The criminal in this case has animated the urban space in such a way that whoever does not follow the prescribed operation manual becomes a victim of crime. Zollo is himself introduced to the Nairobi operation manual the first day that he arrives from Murang'a by a street boy/ pickpocket. When he leaves his box at the bus stop to take a seat further down the waiting area outside Tea Room, a street boy (masquerading as a student) walks up to him and asks: "Are you new here? Next time don't leave your box unattended. *This is Nairobi and you can lose it anytime if you don't take care*" (My Life in

Crime, 6; emphasis added). By the phrase "This is Nairobi", Zollo is simply being told that Nairobi has its own code of conduct which is not like that of the village or any other city and which requires that people behave in a particular manner within the urban space failure to which then they have themselves to blame. As if to prove his point, the same boy who approaches Zollo to give him a hint on city life tricks his very 'student' into stealing the latter's box. Zollo applies the same principle on the city's code of operation when he breaks into the car earlier mentioned. Since any person who parks his/ her car in that side of the city–anywhere beyond River Road[34]– ignorantly fails to follow this Nairobi manual, Zollo then has the responsibility to teach him or her a few lessons about Nairobi. He steals everything from the car including a pistol which he "*luckily*" finds in the dashboard compartment (35).

Clearly, the criminal has captured the city and both the urban space and its occupants (and all that which they own) belong to him. This point is clearly made by Adams Wamathina (an ex-prisoner who has done literally almost everything that Jack Zollo has done throughout his criminal life) in John Kiriamiti's Son of Fate (1994). When Wamathina (aka Son of fate or S.O.F) meets a prostitute, Mumbi who claims to know him (and in fact not only knowing him but claiming family ties as his niece) he wonders:

> I hadn't given my name to anyone in the bar and after all the girl was too young to have known me *when the town 'belonged' to me*. *I mean when I was a gangster* and used to move from one bar to the other, spending money the easy way just like how I got it. (Son of Fate, 101; emphasis added)

[34]River Road is important in the Kenyan urban novel because it is what separates the 'safe' city centre from the 'unsafe' self-help Nairobi. Away from fiction, to the ordinary Nairobi dweller, River Road has become synonymous to all that is illegitimate in Kenya from muggings to pirated music (video cassettes and CDs). See Granqvist (2004) on the importance of River Road in the division of the Nairobi city map.

As Philip Howell claims, crime writing does not really focus on a completely unknown city but instead offers to the reader alternative epistemologies of the city (1998:359). Since the city belongs to the criminal as S.O.F claims above, therefore, Zollo in My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison has a certain level of knowledge about of the city through which he takes the reader thus conferring to him or her (the reader) alternative ways of knowing the city. The crime story unravels certain 'truths' about the city that would otherwise have been inaccessible to the reader. According to Simon Dentith, crime writing is a way of unlocking the otherwise mysterious depths of the city. "The mystery of the big city", Dentith claims, "is made narratable, its story can be told because of the aberrant nature of crime– the transgression, indeed, providing the opportunity for narrative" (1990:20). Kiriamiti unlocks these mysterious depths of the city through a number of ways among which the most important is letting the reader into the criminal's mindset which then serves as the reader's copy of the city's operation manual. The reader is able to know why certain things happen in the city through the revelations that Zollo makes about the criminal's life in the city. This Kiriamiti does by leading the reader into the criminal's underworld whether in the city streets, the bars, certain residential estates or even in prison.

One of the most important ways through which the criminal personalizes public space is by literally capturing and marking certain city quarters so that they become part of the criminal milieu. Such places/spaces become known and perhaps dreaded for the criminal activities with which they are associated. Dandora, Kawangware, Riruta and Congo which Genga-Idowu lists as the "mother of thieves and armed robbers", in this chapter's epigraph, are examples of such places within the Nairobi urban topography.

Essentially such places or estates are of low standards or poor in both infrastructure and their inhabitants as compared to the rest of the city space. In other words, what emerges clearly in the Kenyan urban novel is the fact that 'low-income-earner' habitats (slum areas) seem to attract criminals and criminal activities (see Chapter Two for a definition of a criminal in the present context). In his survey of the social order of the slum in Chicago's Adam's Area, Gerald Suttles observes that these low-status city zones grow and flourish in crime because they are formed as a result of what he calls a "differential moral isolation" from the wider society (1970: 5). According to Suttles:

> In all societies there are people who fall short of existing standards that attest to their trustworthiness and self-restraint…A very large proportion of the… population is regarded with suspicion and caution. Typically these are poor people from a low-status minority group and unable to manage very well their "public relations". (1970:5)

In fact in the American society such people are considered as making life difficult for others and "a common solution to this difficulty has been to relegate all suspicious people to 'slums' and 'skid rows'" (Suttles 1970:5). Although it would be quite erroneous to argue that slum inhabitants are actually suspicious people (read: crime suspects), obviously criminals find slum areas habitable more than other parts of the city in Kiriamiti's novels. Nairobi's (in)famous Eastlands is one such a hive of criminal activity. Stretching right from Machakos Country Bus Station (about one kilometer south east of the CBD) through Kayole and Komarock, Eastlands sprawls for nearly over 30 kilometers of the city. The history of this sprawling residential area can be traced, like the larger Nairobi area, back to colonial times. In fact the term Eastlands was a colonial reference to the 'African' estates of Jericho, Uhuru, Bahati, Maringo, Kaloleni and Kimathi.[35] These and other estates like Pumwani, Pangani and Eastleigh, were

[35] See John Makeni, "Kenya: What Police are Doing to Combat Crime", Available at

predominantly inhabited, in colonial Kenya, by African male labourers who primarily came to Nairobi in search of employment. I am deliberately invoking the aspect of particularly male Africans here because Eastland's heavy male presence is almost inevitable in a discussion of a section of Nairobi that could literally be termed as a 'dormitory city'.

According to Kurtz (1998), Africans were considered temporary residents in Nairobi by the white colonial administration thus men were not allowed to bring their families into the city. Resultantly, Nairobi became what would be called a 'male city'; a city characterized by a strong masculine presence and an equally strong feminine absence. In fact, African women in colonial Nairobi were considered a menace whose role was to 'immoralize' the urban male and the urban space and in isolated cases were deported to the village once found.[36] Nevertheless, what makes this particular quarter of Nairobi conducive for criminals? Why does Zollo prefer to live in Eastleigh to other estates, for instance? What possibilities do such areas as Eastleigh and Mathare Valley offer the criminal?

Considering Zollo's delight in having to live in Wood Street in Eastleigh, the reader would certainly want to know what exactly makes this part of the city more habitable than anywhere else for somebody with Zollo's "kind of job". This is captured in Zollo's own words after he realizes that his sister, Connie, has secured a house for him in Eastleigh. He says:

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http://www.kutokanet.com/issues/violence, 10/04/2006.

[36] See Luise White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (1990).

> I agreed with her even before I knew where the apartment was, and when I realized that it was in Wood Street in Eastleigh I was delighted. *That was a very nice place for a man with my kind of job* and I liked it better than any other place I stayed in Nairobi. (My Life in Crime, 33; emphasis mine)

From the passage above, it is clear that Zollo has his own 'version' of Eastleigh; Eastleigh that may be known and yet unknown to the reader. If other people live in Eastleigh because that is where their finances can allow them, for Zollo living in Eastleigh is by sheer choice. Kiriamiti sets out therefore to inform the reader of the various ways through which the criminal knows and uses this familiar yet unfamiliar urban space. Eastleigh and other residential areas within Nairobi's Eastlands such as Mathare Valley are important to the criminal for, among others, two major reasons one of which is planning. Since these areas tend to be poorly planned, that is, comprising many residences within a rather small area,

> [the] narrow and winding paths… provide a favorable environment for criminal and antisocial activities because the area becomes almost inaccessible to security forces. Chasing and capturing criminals in slums is difficult, as they have better knowledge of the escape routes and hideouts. (Pokhariyal 2005)

Although Eastleigh and most other parts of Eastlands may not qualify as slums *per se*, it is for the same reasons that Pokhariyal (2005) notes above, that such areas are deemed fit for criminal habitation. Most of these areas are highly populated thus this congestion works to the criminal's advantage. In fact according to Granqvist (2004), in most of the Spear books of the 1970s (and perhaps 1980s), "the slums of Eastleigh are most of the time mentioned as an obscure locale for residence and hideout" (67).

The second reason for which Eastleigh is appropriate for criminal habitation is because it is primarily an avenue for prostitution. As shall be discussed in the pages that follow, the prostitute is one of the criminal's closest allies both for sexual services and for piping confidential criminal information from the police. In fact Eastleigh is one of the most focused upon parts of Eastlands on which popular urban novelists in Kenya set out to base their stories focusing on the representation of urban prostitution and crime. Granqvist (2004) cites the example of Charles Mangua's Dodge Kiunyu, in Son of Woman, who is not only born of a prostitute in Eastleigh but also who is constantly in and out of Eastleigh in search of prostitutes.

Like Dodge, Zollo's life in Eastleigh is characterized by an array of prostitutes whom he lays from time to time. The only reason that Zollo's involvement with prostitutes is different is because these prostitutes are acquaintances to criminals while Dodge's relationship with prostitutes in Eastleigh is purely transactional. For Zollo and his criminal friends, only services from specific prostitutes may be considered so that actually the set-up between the criminals and prostitutes is almost similar to that of marriage. In other words, particular prostitutes pair up with particular criminals in Eastleigh so that a criminal does not lay any other prostitute that he comes across. Indeed, Zollo is not just any other Nairobi man with an "itching crotch" (to borrow from Granqvist), for he turns down offers from prostitutes that he feels do not deserve him or prostitutes with whom he is not acquainted. For this reason Zollo can talk of "Kamande's prostitute" (My Life in Crime, 54), for example and so on. In Eastleigh, Zollo does not even tell the reader that a woman is a prostitute because to him it is given that any woman he encounters in the neighbourhood is a prostitute. For example, one day having just arrived from Kagondo Bar where a plot was being drawn to rob a certain white man in Westlands, Zollo suddenly hears a knock at his Eastleigh home.

On opening, the visitor is a lady neighbor in the same block as Zollo. After introducing herself to Zollo and telling him that she is a friend to his roommate, Wanjau, Zollo is almost certain that she is a prostitute and undoubtedly addresses her as just that when he says:

> "I guess you didn't come all the way to introduce yourself or just to make me know that you know me…" I was being rude deliberately. One thing I never liked was getting too acquainted with whores around my residential area. Suppose I came home with a new girl and they made a scene? … "Talk business and I guess that way we will understand each other. If it is about being broke and you want to give me a ride for a pound, I am sorry to inform you that I am impotent". (My Life in Crime, 22-23)

Several revelations about Zollo and the Eastleigh neighbourhood emerge in the passage above. Zollo is not only making an assumption that the girl is a prostitute but also seems to be telling the reader that he knows how Eastleigh operates. Zollo knows that in Eastleigh a girl does not come into a man's house to tell him how much she knows him but only comes for business. Although some of the girls living in Eastleigh may not be what I will call full-time prostitutes, they may temporarily get into prostitution when times are bad (financially). This can be deduced from Zollo's statement about the girl being broke and offering him "a ride for a pound" (23).

Another important place in the city for Jack Zollo is the bar. The bar is, not only for the criminal but also for most other urbanites, the most suitable place both in times of merriment and anguish. In his discussion of Meja Mwangi's Nairobi trilogy (mentioned elsewhere in this study), Graebner (1992) notes the great role that the bar plays in the lives of Mwangi's characters especially for Ben and Ocholla in Going Down River Road

and for Dusman Gonzaga (the meter reader) in The Cockroach Dance. According to Graebner, bars are important to these Nairobi dwellers not only for alcohol consumption but also because

> [b]ars are the normal context of prostitution … One of the main reasons for men to frequent bars is to find a woman for the night. The transaction is usually effected via food and drink, i.e. the man has to buy the drinks, in many cases also a meal, in the morning the woman might get an extra payment, yet this is not obligatory. By paying for food and drinks the man buys his right to sleep with a woman. (1992: 139-140)

If both alcohol and sex seem important to the urbanite in the Kenyan urban novel and perhaps the sole reason for which most men frequent bars, what makes the criminal's use of the bar distinct? What is it that the reader does not know about the bar that Kiriamiti's writing unravels?

For Jack Zollo and his fellow criminals the bar is an office. It is a place for strategizing and creating networks, sharing loot and most importantly a space of self-definition for the criminal as he mingles with other people in the same space. The bar is to the criminal an office because it is a safe haven in which deals can be carried out with the least suspicion. For instance Kagondo Bar is for Jack Zollo and his criminal friends a home and an office. It is a meeting point prior to any robbery and a place to celebrate after successful loots. This point is confirmed by Stanley Githenji (alias G.G) in a conversation with Zollo in which the latter suggests that they meet at Kagondo Bar to plan on the huge robbery at a Naivasha Bank. Asked by Zollo whether he has any objection to holding their meeting at Kagondo, Stanley replies, "Not the least. It is even one of the best places in which we can talk" (My Life in Crime, 163). Among other urban spaces, the bar is one of the places where the city's anonymity of which Barth

(1999) speaks is clearly exhibited and for the criminal not all bars give him this anonymity and immunity to suspicion but only specific bars. For Zollo and his criminal friends that bar is Kagondo Bar.

Kagondo Bar is safe for several other reasons besides the fact that the bar (any bar) could be argued to give its patrons a certain level of freedom not available elsewhere. Firstly, one important factor that makes Kagondo a criminal's home and office is because the bartenders are part of the criminal game. In fact Zollo says that he has the right to talk to Mwaura and Suzy (the Kagondo bartenders)[37] anyhow because he is their boss and they are answerable to him since they are on his payroll (My Life in Crime, 163-164). One of the duties for which the bartender is paid by the criminal is spying and alerting the criminal of the presence of 'harmful' people such as the police or sell-out criminals. The other significant duty of the bartender is to keep the criminal's gun (or what, in Zollo's crime circles, is referred to as "a parcel"). For example in a phone conversation between Zollo and Mwaura, the rather ambivalent master-servant relationship emerges with the bartender taking instructions from his other boss besides the Kagondo Bar Manager:

> 'Hello, this is Mwaura speaking. Who is on the line?'
>
> 'Take it easy, old boy, it is your boss. Do you see any new faces around there?'
>
> 'Not what you would call new.'
>
> 'But do you recognize any as a cop?'
>
> 'No cops around pal.'

[37] Suzy's work at Kagondo is to make beds in the empty rooms but she also doubles up as Zollo's object of sexual gratification whenever he wants as long as can he buy her beer and pay a few pounds for services rendered (cf. Graebner, 1992).

> '…Then keep my parcel ready, I'll have to pick it today under all costs. If you see faces you don't trust before I come, do what you can and meet me before I enter there. Understand?' (My Life in Crime, 172)

The master-servant relationship between the criminal and the bartender however is a rather strange one. Although Zollo says that he is Mwaura's boss, they both seem to be on different 'terms of contract'. The language in which both master and servant address each other seems to actually undermine the master-servant relationship that they both claim to have. For instance, what does it mean for Zollo to call Mwaura "old boy" or for Mwaura to address his boss, Zollo, as "pal"? Although they claim to be in a master-servant relationship, Mwaura and Zollo are more of friends and colleagues than anything else. Clearly therefore, through the criminal's relationship with the bartender, what exactly transpires in these urban spaces with which the reader is so familiar yet so unfamiliar, is exposed.

The second reason for which Kagondo is important to the criminal is that it is an information bureau. In the bar, the criminal meets a number of prostitutes whom, Zollo says, are shared by both the criminal and the police. The relationship between bars or particularly alcohol, and sex has a long history not only in Kenyan fiction but also in other cultures and literatures of the world.[38] Alcohol and sex seem to be inseparable and to complement each other. Like beer, women (particularly those who drink or work in bars/ taverns) in most of these literatures are treated as consumable goods (or/ and services) whose supply is always in surplus thus their consumption depends on the purchasing power of the individual male patrons. Florence Sipalla in her study of

[38] See for example, Stefan Hardt, Tod und Eros beim Essen 'Death and Eros at Mealtimes' (1987) on the relationship between alcohol and sex in European literature.

popular discourses in the Kenyan film Dangerous Affair posits that women spotted in pubs especially as barmaids are generally viewed as being 'loose' and are double-cast as prostitutes (2004:42). What Sipalla observes in Kenyan film is a replica of the representation of these women in other fictions, for instance the novel or the short story. For instance in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's short story "Minutes of Glory", Nyaguthii the barmaid and her colleagues are cast as having two jobs, as barmaids and prostitutes. This double-casting of women is not only to be found in works of fiction but also in certain Kenyan cultures. In a study on the consumption of alcohol in East Africa, Justin Willis (2002) observes that there are certain popular subversive discourses on drinking that tend to peg immorality to it (drinking). Women who consume alcohol more especially are labeled as 'loose' in East Africa, Willis reports. This is the same model that Kiriamiti adopts in his representation of women in bars. Owing to the fact that Njeri works in a bar, she easily doubles up as a prostitute.

Similarly other women drinking at Kagondo Bar are all considered prostitutes. These prostitutes found in drinking places then act as informers for the criminal because they know for example which criminal is on the police 'most wanted' list but at the same time the same prostitutes are police informers. The criminal then has to be friendly (carefully so, however) with the former in order to be on the know in case of anything because

> [w]hen a job is pulled, every prostitute knows which gang committed the crime. Criminals also [do] the same thing. Whenever they get money, the first place to go is to those bars. There are certain bars that they frequent a lot. The same prostitutes are friendly to the cops. When the criminal is in she is with the cops. When he comes out and because he has money to waste, the girl goes back to him. (My Life in Crime, 60)

In "Taverns and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution", Thomas Brennan observes that public drinking places create and recreate a number of different public spheres whose publics then develop distinct patterns of sociability and identity (2006:107). "The public drinking place, once merely a wine shop on every corner", Brennan comments, "suddenly multiplie[s] its forms, functions, and offerings" (107). Like the bars in Paris – in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century – of which Brennan speaks, Kagondo Bar which might be just a drinking place for most other urbanites has multiple functions for the criminal figure and he therefore personalizes it and utilizes it for purposes for which other urbanites do not.

The third and perhaps most unfamiliar urban space into which the criminal leads the reader is the prison. Although Kamiti Maximum Prison is situated within Nairobi city, not any ordinary urbanite knows what exactly goes on there. Through the criminal then the reader gains access into this unfamiliar urban space. According to Albert Nussbaum, "the prison writer is uniquely qualified to write about the world in which he or she is literally an insider" (1999: 353). Owing to the fact that part of Zollo's story is told from prison then like the prison writer, the criminal who tells his story in prison or who tells his prison experience even outside that prison, is equally qualified to speak of this world in which he is (was) an insider. The reader and the ordinary urbanite by extension are therefore led into this urban space by a person who knows it better than anyone else. According to Granqvist (2004), incarceration or detention is part of urban life style in the Kenyan urban novel in the Spear Books series (105). This is especially so for the criminal because almost always, the criminal's story (confession) is told (made) in prison.[39]

[39] See for example, Mwangi Gicheru's Across the Bridge (1979) and Frank Saisi's The Bhang Syndicate (1984),

What is interesting in Kiriamiti's representation of prison and Zollo's prison life particularly is that like in the 'free' city, Zollo is a hero who triumphs over all the hurdles. For Zollo, the prison is just another urban space that he continues exploring as part of his adventures in the city. When Zollo is sentenced to twenty years imprisonment with forty eight strokes of the cane at the Kamiti Maximum Prison, perhaps one would expect him to have felt like one beaten by the law. To the contrary, although during his first days in prison he is distraught, before long Zollo adapts to prison life and like in the 'free' city where he ruled, Zollo becomes the king in prison.

Throughout his prison life, Zollo seeks to expose what happens behind the high walls of prison. It is through Zollo's prison life that the reader is able to access the criminal underworld of both the inmates and the prison warders. Besides the violence and animosity that goes on between the inmates and prison warders, Zollo comes out as the incarcerated hero who takes over the prison with his cunning character and actually even succeeds in forming a syndicate which is responsible for disciplining warders (My Life in Prison, 176-182). Like his life in crime in the 'free' city, Zollo continues with the story of the criminal beyond the free world. For example, he takes the reader through the activities of both inmates and warders as criminals in prison. For instance, an inmate called Deya who is imprisoned for robbery with violence forms a gang in prison which continues to terrorize other prisoners as robbers. Zollo says of Deya and his gang:

> …Deya… was a boxer simply because there was nothing else he liked better than bashing people…The gang he was leading was as terrible as he

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among others.

> was. Because he never worked but stayed in the block always, he was not given any earnings. So when others purchased things like sugar, he and his gang became robbers. They would investigate and find out who had cigarettes or money. When they suspected you had some, they merely surrounded you and held you down, then took everything, knowing you would never dare take them to the authorities. (My Life in Prison, 102)

Like the prisoners who form gangs and syndicates, the prison warders too have their criminal ways of surviving in prison. In fact Zollo tells us that in prison there is no difference between the law breakers and the law keepers. Essentially they all use criminal means to survive. For instance, the warders con the prisoners of their hard-earned money (giving them lame excuses like urgent weddings and so on) when they send them to smuggle 'unauthorized' items into prison (My Life in Prison, 195). To Zollo therefore whether in the free city space or in prison, the crime story still continues to portray the seductive thrill of crime but notably relying on first hand experience (Nussbaum, 1999: 353).

Clearly, so far the criminal has established himself as an urban planner who dictates what others do and within what temporal and spatial contexts. Unlike other people in the city who appear to be completely battered by city life, the criminal is the king of the city and as such maps the city space giving it meanings that perhaps only he can give. Kiriamiti's representation of both the criminal and the urban space in which he operates contrasts, as discussed, the representation of the city by other Kenyan writers, like, Meja Mwangi, Leonard Kibera among others. The city in which Jack Zollo lives is not characterized by the pain and agony in which Meja Mwangi's characters (Meja, Maina, Ben and Ocholla) live in. Instead Kiriamiti gives the criminal figure such positive agency that the city's image as a site of pervasion is almost reversed and the reader can

then begin to read this urban space as a site of exciting discoveries. Indeed therefore, the crime story unravels mysteries of the city through the criminal's activities in the city's underworld. As the criminal utilizes and personalizes certain urban spaces, the ordinary city dweller (or the reader) then gains access to the urban underbelly and subsequently gets to understand why certain things happen the way they do within the city.

In the following chapter, I will discuss how in his mapping of the city, the criminal relies on popular stereotypes already in circulation within the urban space. These stereotypes, I argue, are used by both the criminal and Kiriamiti the writer to win the reader to the criminal's cause owing to the familiarity that perhaps comes with shared knowledge.

CHAPTER FOUR

"IMAGINE AN INDIAN SUPPLYING YOU WITH FREE LUNCH": STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE CRIMINAL'S CITY

Kulsum, the mother to Salim Juma (the chief protagonist) in Moyez G. Vassanji's The Gunny Sack (1989) is an African of Asian origin vacillating between the East African countries of Tanzania and Kenya just like the rest of the Dhanji Govindji family to which Salim claims ancestry. In their sojourn and subsequent (re)settlement in colonial East Africa, quite inevitably, the Govindjis come into contact with two more races besides their Asian race: Whites and black Africans. Being the family's 'holy-of-holies' Kulsum perceives her Asian descent as being superior and in deed perfect to the other two and resultantly tailors her own theory of creation in which God is a potter who sets out to mould and kiln three identical dolls. According to Kulsum, after molding the three dolls:

> [God] put the first doll into the oven to finish it, but, alas, brought it out too soon: it came out white and undone. In this way was born the white race. With this lesson learnt, the Almighty put the second doll into the oven, but this time he kept it in for too long. It came out burnt and black. Thus the black race. Finally the One and Only put the last doll inside the oven, and brought it out at just the right time. It came out golden brown, the Asian, simply perfect. (The Gunny Sack, 73)

For Kulsum –and perhaps other Asians in Tanganyika (present Tanzania) at the time (around the 1950s and 1960s) – the complexity of other races could only be explained

through mythmaking. The whites become the pale and undone doll thus making them imperfect and black Africans, on the other hand, as the burnt doll become equally imperfect. What is fascinating about this myth, or theory as Vassanji has it, at least on the surface, is the prejudice beneath the pigment difference and how Kulsum sets out to, in quite an interesting way, valorize her own race. But then what does the perception of other races by a person of a different race have to do with a study on crime writing? Or what is important in a character's theory of creation in a study that is least concerned with creation myths or religion for that matter? What is intriguing in Kulsum's theory is the character's ability to create narratives around that which is unknown or complex for his or her understanding and how these narratives gain popularity and subsequently come to determine the way that person (or a particular 'inside' group) relates with other 'outside' groups.

In this chapter, Kiriamiti's appropriation of urban popular knowledge in the telling of the criminal's story will be examined. The thesis advanced in the chapter is that in his representation of the criminal's city, Kiriamiti largely uses certain popular discourses that are in circulation within the city space and are thus familiar to the urbanites, and to his assumed readership by extension, purposely to manipulate his readers. The chapter seeks to answer certain significant questions that the use of popular knowledge in crime writing seems to raise. What is the relevance of such discourses in Kiriamiti's work or rather how helpful are these discourses in crime writing owing to the fact that most of them are not factual? What does the use of popular discourses allow the crime writer to do that he would not have done? Are particular discourses particular to the urban space and if not what makes their use in the city different? These popular discourses, perhaps one would argue, emanate from narratives that urbanites, like Vassanji's Kulsum, create around the various complexities of the city space and its inhabitants in an attempt to

understand them. Indeed, this postulation echoes Dan Ojwang's claim that a particular popular image about a person or a group comes about as a precondition for understanding that person(s) or rather it is "an abstraction meant to reduce the complexity of a particular reality to a codified one that provides for predictability and consistency" (2005: 5). This chapter's interest in these popular discourses is founded on the fact that as a criminal Jack Zollo clearly utilizes urban popular imagination in the way that he deals with particular urbanites whether in the free city space or even in prison.

One of crime writing's greatest features that makes it so popular, Stephen Knight –in the introduction to Crime Fiction: Detection, Death, Diversity– argues, is its ability to reuse and reinvent the familiar or what he calls "compulsive patters" (2004:x). According to Knight, compulsive patters are mere talks which although cheap are very obsessive and at times compelling within certain contexts. The assumption in this supposition is that once the readers are presented with that which is familiar to them, then the crime writer appeals to the formers' psyche thus winning their attention and company throughout the story. Particularly, in the crime story in which the criminal's point of view is given and with which this study is concerned, the use of Knight's "compulsive patters" has the effect of familiarizing the reader with the criminal's world or the writer's fictional creation while at the same time establishing a platform of common knowledge between the reader and the world of the text. In other words, the establishment of common knowledge between the criminal and the reader enables the latter to freely establish a reliable and obliging relationship between himself or herself and the former. This is so because the crime genre largely relies on popular imagination and the crime writer sets out from the beginning to grant the reader a privileged knowingness of these discourses so that the reader stands out as an expert *vis-à-vis* the

writer (Howell 1998:367). According to Dentith (1990) in his discussion of the representation of Glasgow in Mcllvanney's novels, this superior knowingness "encourages the reader to negotiate the realities of the city [as represented in the crime story because it] puts him or her in a position of confident knowledge with respect to the city" (26).

An important point to begin the examination of Kiriamiti's works in this respect with would be to briefly evaluate how these popular discourses come about and their relevance within the urban space or particularly to the urban inhabitant. Indeed, the city is a meeting point for many peoples from different other places and with different mannerisms. In an attempt to understand the differences and similarities which each individual brings into the city, the urbanite therefore finds currency in the narrative. Upon constant repetition these narratives eventually form the basis on which people in the city come to experience the urban space and its inhabitants because these narratives become a set of shared knowledge, attitudes and sometimes prejudices among the urbanites. It is these narratives that I am referring to as popular discourses/imagination/knowledge in this chapter. Such popular discourses within the Kenyan urban space which Kiriamiti largely exploits in his works and which this chapter shall focus on include narratives on racial and tribal differences which tend to lead to the stereotypical casting of urbanites. In this chapter, I will also focus on the stereotypical representation of women in Kiriamiti's works. How does Kiriamiti as a writer reinforce certain familiar discourses on women and how does the criminal utilize these stereotypes as he cruises through the city space?

A stereotype, according to Stroebe and Insko (1989) is "a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people" (5). This, Stroebe and Insko argue, is a neutral and reasonable definition of stereotypes because over the years the term has gained certain negative connotations to mean biased perceptions of persons and groups (1989:5). Although this argument may be valid and indeed useful for the present study, the fact that more often than not stereotypes tend to form the basis for prejudice and discrimination against 'outgroups' cannot be disputed. In fact prejudice could be defined as a negative attitude towards a group or persons which is as a result of any stereotyping which in essence associates members of a particular group with predominantly negative attributes. In a study on the Kenyan award winning film mentioned in Chapter Three, Dangerous Affair, Sipalla (2004) claims that "stereotypes operate on a pendulum where societal attitudes are not necessarily fixed but they are built on widely held beliefs and prejudices in society" (30). Once these beliefs and prejudices are circulated within the society, Sipalla says, "they tend to construct and reinforce certain perceptions about people or situations" (30). It is these perceptions that eventually lead to negative stereotyping of those that do not belong to a particular group in that social set-up.

Indeed, the crime genre is in itself very stereotypical both in its form and content. Whether it is the (in)famous detective crime story discussed in Chapter One or the autobiographical criminal account, the crime story tends towards fitting within a certain stereotypical formula. For instance, the detective story (stories by Agatha Christie and Alexander McCall Smith, for example) almost always begins with a crime–committed by an unknown person–which professional investigators or police fail to solve and has to be solved by an amateur detective. Although the amateur detective unravels the mystery through pedestrian and intuitive means, by the end of the story the criminal is

known or the whodunit is revealed. Usually the detective is a stereotyped country woman with(out) basic education or a 'run-of the-mill' policeman known for her/his extraordinary wit which facilitates the unraveling of mysteries (mostly murder mysteries). Through its characterization and the frame within which the story is told in general, it follows a stereotyped form. Besides its form, the genre relies by and large on the use of stereotypes in its content. According to John Reilly:

> Stereotypes, or characters cast from a predictable mold shaped by popular expectations, have a natural home in popular [read; crime] literature, which resounds with images and abbreviated thoughts that make up the common consciousness of a culture or one of its subdivisions. (1999: 429)

The stereotyped character is important in crime and mystery writing because, Reilly claims, he sets up expectations or even suspicions in the mind of the reader (1999:430). In other words the reader knows what to expect from such a stereotyped character even before he plunges himself or herself into action. This argument is equally advanced in a different context by Ojwang (2005). In a study on the representation of the Asian stereotype in East Africa, Ojwang (2005) observes that in stereotypical representation the subjects are well-known before they are actually encountered so that once they are encountered they are only slotted into already scripted roles (6).

In Kiriamiti's writing, the stereotyped character is expected to take up certain roles before he actually takes them and even his performance in those roles is predetermined depending on what stereotypical traits are in circulation. For instance, when Zollo meets an Indian (Hirji Shah) in Congo, even before this Indian does anything with Zollo, the reader is persuaded to slot him into a business/ merchandiser role because of already established stereotypes on Asians as businessmen (My Life in Crime, 102). In a

study on the relationship between sexual differences and social behaviour, Eagly (1987) observes that many gender and ethnic/racial stereotypes are actually shaped by the social roles that people from different groups take when intergroup contact occurs (15). For instance, when an Indian is encountered not only in crime writing but other forms of writing (especially in East Africa), the reader is expected to have already set the role of the unscrupulous merchant for the Indian so that once he is actually encountered he is simply fitted into his "scripted role".[40] This is so because even in colonial East Africa people of Asian origin took up roles as merchants thus in popular imagination they came to be associated with business.

Ultimately, owing to negative stereotyping, East African Asians become synonymous to dishonest, ravenous and generally very mean business deals.[41] In other words the Indian is expected to do anything whether it is the daily-encountered *duka wallah* exploiting his African laborers or tampering with his weighing scale machines or the stinking-rich car dealer selling stolen cars and spare parts for a price twice as much as new ones would cost.[42] In Kiriamiti's novels therefore, the Indian is expected to aide the criminal for example by modifying stolen cars or even renting out cars to be used in robberies provided he is entitled to a share of the loot. For instance, when Zollo meets Mota Singh the latter modifies the car by which the former runs off to Congo. In return, Mota asks Zollo to steal another Indian's Volkswagen as part of the payment for his services (My Life in Crime, 76). The Indian however takes part in these deals with purely business motives as shall be shown later in the chapter.

[40] See Dan Ojwang, "'The Bad Baniani Sports Good Shoes': 'Asian' Stereotypes and the Problem of Modernity in East Africa" (2005) for this aspect of the stereotyped Asian/Indian.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] *Ibid*.

In this chapter and with respect to the texts under study, stereotypes shall be discussed under three major categories: racial, tribal and gender stereotypes. In Kenya, stereotypes are one of the most ubiquitous popular attitudes whether in reality or in fiction. The most enduring and perhaps widespread of all being the tribal stereotypes in which certain attributes are associated with particular tribes. For example the Kikuyu tribe is known for love of money which is realized either through businesses or theft. In a newspaper article, "Stereotypes about Men", the Kenyan Saturday Nation contributor, Phyllis Nyambura says of the Kikuyu stereotype:

> The Kikuyu man walks, eats and dreams more plots, *matatus* [public taxis] and company shares…And most people must have heard the joke about the Kamaus [Kikuyus] coming for your hard-earned money in the middle of the night. All the vices such as muggings, carjackings and so on are believed to be their preserve.[43]

It is important to mention here however that although the group that is the target of the stereotyped traits may not admit or even confirm traits with which they may be associated, they are aware of these discourses and are likely to be manipulated by their consistent and repetitive use since "[t]he stereotype…is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place and already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1994:66). For instance since in colonial Kenya, the Kamba were largely recruited into the Kenya African Rifles (KAR), the stereotype about Kambas being what Timothy Parsons calls "military material" was so anxiously repeated that some Kambas came to believe that they actually were a martial race (Parsons 1999: 672). Perhaps it this idea that Kambas were the Queen's soldiers that subsequently bore the stereotype of the Kamba as faithful servants who

[43] See Phyllis Nyambura, "Stereotypes about Men", Saturday Nation 16/01/2004 p. 6-7, available at http://www.nationmedia.com/saturdaynation. See also, Phyllis Nyambura, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly", Saturday Nation 27/12/2003, available at http://www.nationmedia.com/saturdaynation.

obey without questioning, as the Kenyan writer and dramatist, Prof. Katama Mkangi puts it.[44] This goes a long way into showing that no matter how unfounded stereotypes may be, sometimes the target groups come to believe that the stereotypes about them are actually true and even use them as an explanation for what they do. Despite their being unreliable and the fact that they are largely untrue, Maina Mutonya says that "one of the reasons that stereotypes are retained is that they serve so many functions including helping people to maintain positive image, justifying their social status and worldview" (2006:170). Tribal stereotypes are almost inevitable in a multi-ethnic country (like Kenya) where ethnicity continues to be a defining factor. In fact in Kenya, tribal stereotypes are so popular such that they are present in almost every aspect of people's lives; judgments about people tend to be made on basis of their tribe, especially in politics.[45] Stereotypes of cheeky Gikuyus, extravagant Luos, and trustworthy Maasais among others–most of which were engineered by perpetrators of British colonialism in the divide and rule colonial policy–continue to circulate amongst the Kenyan population to date.[46]

Notably, the same stereotypes have gradually found their way into not only fiction but popular arts in general. One of the major art forms which largely capitalizes on tribal stereotypes is the comedy in Kenya. According to Fred Mbogo (2006), there would be almost nothing to laugh at without tribal stereotypes in Kenyan comedy because they are the sole source of humour that spices up this genre. These stereotyped images are exhibited, according to Mbogo, through exaggerated ethnic accents which then assist the audience to identify the characters' tribe and following the existing stereotype traits

[44] Quoted in Babafemi Badejo, Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics (2006).
[45] See, among others, Hellen Nyambura-Mwaura, "Tribal Stereotypes Help Shape Election", The Brunei Times, http://bt.com.bn.
[46]Macharia Munene, "The Colonial Policies of Segregating the Gikuyu, 1920-1964" (2000).

turn the tribe into an object of laughter. Taking Mbogo's argument further, one would also argue that depending on the character's tribe, Kenyan comedians emphasize these tribal stereotypes by the way the various characters respond to situations. For instance, one of Kenya's most popular comedy groups, *Redykyulass* (ridiculous)[47] in one of their shows featured Kenyan veteran politician and former Member of Parliament Simeon Nyachae as not being able to control his temper in a media interview. This did not only serve to reflect Nyachae as a particular individual but as representing an entire tribe which was literally meant to reaffirm the popular stereotype of the Kisii (the tribe to which Nyachae belongs) people as being highly aggressive and short tempered. Resultantly therefore it is not actually that particular person that becomes an object and subject of laughter but the tribe from which he or she belongs. Another popular street comedy group known for its tribal caricatures is *Nyengese*. In one show, *Nyengese* set out to prove the popular stereotype of Kikuyus as thieves by claiming that from Nairobi's Kibera Magistrate Court to European criminal courts the list of offenders in robbery is always: Kamau, Njoroge, Maina and Mwaura (all Kikuyu names).[48]

The stereotyped character is as important in crime writing as much as s/he is in comedy and other popular art forms. However, in crime writing, the stereotyped character is not cast as just an object of ridicule but is actually a guide for the criminal. Kiriamiti's works

[7] *Redykyulass* is a comedy group which ridicules political leaders in Kenya. The group comprises of three young Kenyans (John Kiarie, Tony Njuguna and Walter Mong'are) who came together in the late 1990s as college students at a time when the former President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi's dictatorship was heightening in Kenya. In most of their shows, *Redykyulass* featured the former president and his (then) close political ally Hon. Joseph Kamotho (who had declared himself a KANU member for life). After the 2002 general elections which catapulted Hon. Mwai Kibaki to the presidency, the group switched their major focus from Moi to the first family especially in the ridicule of the (in)famous chaotic first lady, Lucy Kibaki (played by John Kiarie). This move did not amuse the president and his family which subsequently led to the banning of the group's shows on national television stations (although their home video tapes continue to be sold throughout the country).

[48] Personal memory.

in particular capitalize on tribal stereotypes because they and other popular urban narratives, as shall be explained in the pages that follow, determine how the criminal negotiates his way through the city space. Evidently, in his criminal endeavors within Nairobi, Jack Zollo is keen on the tribes of the people with whom he works. For example, Zollo is more comfortable to take up a job with Kikuyus rather than other tribes, the Kalenjin for example and clearly any time he attempts a robbery with anyone else other than a Kikuyu, the robbery fails. For instance after he is back from Congo where he has been hiding from the police, Zollo is very broke and when he gets a place to take up a job with his old friend Captain he is only too willing to do so. Zollo and Captain recruit another man for the job, Mulwa who unlike the other two is not Kikuyu but Kamba. The three are planning to rob a certain Indian of his moneybag as he gets out of his supermarket to the bank. Although they narrowly manage to snatch the bag amidst all the drama outside the supermarket, all the money is lost. According to Zollo, Mulwa is responsible for the failure of the planned robbery firstly because he recruits another member to the gang without telling the rest and for acting in a cowardly way thus pouring all the money from the bag. Zollo says of the incident:

> I was so annoyed that I could not talk to any of the gang. I especially did not want to be anywhere near Mulwa, who, apart from being the cause of the failure, was also responsible for bringing a new man without first introducing him to us. (My Life in Crime, 158)

From this incident, the stereotype about Kikuyus being professional thieves is confirmed. The image of the Kikuyus as thieves is one of the most popular stereotypes in Kenya perhaps because of their perceived predisposition to money- making which casts them as being able to engage in anything (including stealing) that would generate money and wealth, as Nyambura (2004) reports. For the crime writer reaffirming stereotypes is important because through stereotyping, the writer is able to manipulate

his readers by telling them what is familiar to them and at the same time validating their knowledge and attitudes about the various tribes. Speaking of Jewish characters in the British detective fiction of the early 19th Century, Julian Symons observes that owing to the popular stereotype of Jews as intellectually inferior, crime writers opted to have Jewish characters in their fiction only to confirm the various stereotypical traits that were already in circulation within the British popular imagination. For instance, the sole role of a Jewish character would be to engage in money lending and perhaps dealing with jewellery but it was almost unthinkable, Symons (1972) argues, to have a Jewish detective because that would be contrary to popular imagination and expectation.

Besides the stereotype of the Kikuyus as thieves, Kiriamiti also uses the popular stereotype of the Kikuyus as being inherently entrepreneurs. In Kenyan popular imagination, as earlier mentioned, the Kikuyus are perceived as born-entrepreneurs who can do business in anything and anywhere provided there is money involved. For instance the only Kenyans (besides the Indian, Hirji Shah) that Zollo meets in Congo are a Kikuyu shopkeeper and his wife. According to Zollo these two could only be in Congo for two reasons; either they, like him, are on the run or they are there to look for precious stones and money:

> Well, could be either or both. If it was because of money, then I believe some words I heard a group of Luos saying, unaware that I could understand their language as much as I understood mine. One was telling the others that *if you wanted to know whether a Kikuyu man is sick, go with some coins and drop them on the floor near him. If he doesn't open his eyes, he is about to die, and if he only manages to lift his head, he is critically sick.* Of course, on my side I believe. After all, what is better than money in this world? (My Life in Crime, 123; emphasis mine)

Clearly, two things emerge from Zollo's views above. Firstly, Zollo is admitting the stereotype about Kikuyus' love of money by believing in it himself and confirming that there is nothing in the world better than money. Secondly, the stereotyping of Kikuyus is coming from another tribal group, which is the Luos. This second observation is important because one thing that sets stereotypes apart from other categories of prejudice is the fact that stereotypes about out-groups must be typically less positive than those about in-groups. In other words stereotypes are characterized by what Stroebe and Insko refer to as ingroup favoritism and outgroup devaluation (1989:5) which typically means that stereotypes actually emanate from one group's devaluation of another.

Apart from the various tribal stereotypes Kiriamiti capitalizes on racial stereotypes basically centered on Asians and Whites. The two races at some point appear as a common enemy for the criminal but more often than not they are targets for his crime. In his criminal endeavors the criminal uses existing racial stereotypes about the two both within the free urban space and in prison. For instance if the target is white the criminal must be more careful than if he is Asian (Indian). This kind of racial stereotyping can be traced back to Kenyan colonial discourses. In colonial Kenya, racial segregation, domination and subjugation were largely a part of the colonial discourses.

As Eagly and Steffen (1984) claim, stereotypes as probabilistic beliefs are difficult to falsify therefore adjusting stereotypes in case of a change in the target group is equally difficult. This explains why most popular stereotypes have not changed over time even after changes in the target groups. Long after colonialism, Kiriamiti is still using racial stereotypes based on colonial discourses. Clearly, there have been changes in the target

group (whites) because presently any white people in Kenya are not there on a colonial mission but as Eagly and Steffen argue, these already existing stereotypes are difficult to falsify even in postcolonial Kenya. Following Eagly and Steffen's postulation therefore, the stereotype of the white man since colonialism continues to prevail in the African popular imagination even when there has been an evident change in the situation. For instance, in an attempt to rob a white farmer in Thika one of Zollo's friends, Kamande is shot and killed by the Whiteman (My Life in Crime, 52-53). This is quite spectacular because the white man is the only target that hits back on Zollo and his gang throughout their criminal lives (besides the police, of course). That particular incident notwithstanding when Zollo is arrested (much later after the attempted robbery) for illegal possession of a firearm, the same white man[49] and another white (with the title now changed to European) are the only people who are able to identify him as a member of gangs that had attacked them on two separate occasions. In the identification parade the first European does not only identify Zollo by touching him according to instructions but gives him a hard blow and quite interestingly although the white man flouts the law the policemen do not say or do anything about it:

> The European I had already forgotten about, for it was a long time since we robbed him, came. He did not go far. *These white people have sickening memories*…In stead of touching me the way he had been instructed to by the Chief Inspector in charge of the parade, he gave me a heavy blow that felled me…the Whiteman then went out. (My Life in Crime, 65; my emphasis)

[49] The constant referring of this target to as the white man is important in the analysis of how stereotypes work because as Homi Bhabha has it in The Location of Culture, "a stereotype is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation of the other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations" (1994:75). The white man therefore can be replaced by any other white man because the stereotype does not allow for differentiation and allows for a slot into which all persons of that outgroup can fit into.

This particular incident confirms the two stereotype traits about the white race previously identified. Firstly, Zollo confirms that white people have better memories than other people and secondly white people have a superiority complex; the more reason the white man disobeys the Chief Inspector to hit Zollo. In fact when Zollo is asked to defend himself concerning the identification he dares the policeman to write down everything that he wants to, including the 'blow' from the white man. He says, "Write every word you jolly well please and don't forget to write how that *colonialist* behaved" (My Life in Crime, 66; emphasis added). According to Zollo, any white man is synonymous to a colonialist.

These stereotypes do not only work for Kiriamiti within the 'free' urban space but also behind prison walls. For example at Naivasha Government Prison, Zollo narrates an incident in which a white prisoner insults and beats up a Kikuyu inmate. This description takes a racial dimension through Kiriamiti's use of the titles, *African* and *European* in his description of the two inmates. Perhaps one would ask why Kiriamiti refers to the non-European prisoner as an African while all along the other prisoners have been identified by their names or their tribes, for they are all Kenyans in a Kenyan prison. If this is only a matter of national identities why does he not call him a *Kenyan* or blatantly a *Kikuy*u without necessarily invoking the *European* versus *African* relations? Apparently, this is because the term *European* in many ways conjures up various ideas about the concept *African* so that both *European* and *African* operate on antonymic terms, which is in itself quite a stereotypical representation. In fact even the types of offences for which the two are in prison are quite stereotypical and set them apart as belonging perhaps not only to different races but also to different economic classes.

> …a fight broke out between an African and the only European prisoner in the block. The European was serving five years for killing a police officer

> and a police dog in a hit-and-run accident. He had been arrested in Tanzania where he had fled to. The African was a Kikuyu serving 14 years for robbery. (My Life in Prison, 77)

The cause of the fight between the two is another interestingly stereotypical representation of both races. The African has what Zollo calls "a peculiar liking for grasshoppers, beetles and other insects" (77). Seemingly, this uncharacteristic (and perhaps African) behavior spoils the white prisoner's appetite. On this particular day, the African sees a beetle pushing soil near the white man's foot and insists on getting it. In response, the white man (later referred to as Johnny) insults him, pours food on his face and beats him up. Kiriamiti graphically captures this racial animosity and prejudice in this passage:

> He took his bowl and all the food in it and hurled it straight at Wainaina's [name given for the first time] face. Before he could recover from the shock, the white man gave Wainaina a blow in the belly and another on the chin which knocked him flat. The other prisoners were watching sullenly. They knew this European and how he despised Africans. *Later I heard that at his trial, he had denied killing anybody, saying that he had only killed two dogs.* (My Life in Prison, 78; my emphasis)

Kiriamiti is aware that this is the image of whites in Kenyan popular imagination or rather these comprise some of the popular discourses that have gained currency over the years and continue to circulate within the Kenyan population about the white race. Resultantly therefore, he capitalizes on that to narrate the encounter that the criminal has with the white race in a rather stereotyped way.

The other interesting stereotypical representation is that of the Indian character. The Indian/Asian character is one of the most stereotyped in East African writing whether in 'serious' or popular literature. Indeed, "[a] lot of ideological labour has gone into the creation of a fixed image of the East African Asian subject" (Ojwang 2005:5). Quoting the Austrian anthropologist Agehananda Bharati, Ojwang summarizes the Asian stereotyped character as:

> [S]neaky, mistrustful, …stick[ing] to each other and …not mix[ing] with others, they are arrogant, they cheat in business, they are cowards, their houses are dirty, they are obnoxiously thrifty, they lower the living standards of their neighbours because they do not spend money even though they could afford luxuries and encourage other people's wealth; they are clannish, they monopolize trade within their fold, they are not trustworthy in business nor in social matters (Bharati 1972:170; quoted in Ojwang 2005: 5).

In his entire life in crime, almost all the Indians that Zollo meets are businessmen. The first Indian that Zollo introduces to the reader is "a certain Sikh" who specializes in modifying stolen cars. In fact this particular Indian does not only aid criminals in their activities but is to some extent a criminal himself. When the reader meets this *Sikh*, Zollo is planning to flee to Congo and he needs to steal a car then have it modified by the *Sikh* (later referred to as Mota Singh); that is, give it new number plates, a different colour and a new road license. Instead of charging Zollo for the services, the Indian gives him (Zollo) what he calls an alternative:

> I would have charged you Shs. 2,000.00 cash but I'll give you an alternative. I need a Volkswagen car, a saloon, not very old. If you don't have a place to go for it, I'll show you an Indian who keeps his carelessly. By the time you bring it, your Volvo will be so ready and good with everything that you'll not be able to recognise it yourself. (My Life in Crime, 76)

In fact Mota is not only a criminal owing to the fact that he modifies stolen cars but also because he aids the criminal in identifying potential targets. For example, when Mota tells Zollo that he can direct him to an Indian who keeps his Volkswagen carelessly, Mota becomes Zollo's aide. Although Zollo says that when an Indian tells you a secret about another Indian he must be sure of what he says, the fact that Mota sells-out his friend to a criminal is a confirmation of the stereotype of the Indian as untrustworthy. Being the closely-knit community that they are imagined to be in popular discourses, one would not expect an Indian to betray another Indian but Kiriamiti sets out to present the Indian as so sly to the extent of harming his own brother. This stereotyped Indian character is actually an accomplice in Zollo's criminal deals. He becomes a partner in crime not only because he is a criminal on his own but because he is an aide to Zollo.

The Indian crook-cum-businessman character is not only found in the city but also behind prison walls. Even in prison, the Indian inmate must be a businessman and must be in jail either for theft or forgery or both. For instance when Johnny (the European) starts fighting with Wainaina and he (Johnny) clearly seems to be losing it, a friend of his –an Indian businessman serving nine years for theft–decides to join the fight against Wainaina (My Life in Prison, 78). As Zollo puts it, the Indian "went for Wainaina in a clumsy sort of way, trying to strangle him. But [he] was weak and Wainaina easily pushed him aside" (79). Zollo's description of the Indian in this incident does not only present to the reader the stereotype of the Indian as a criminal but goes further to reveal certain prejudices with which Indian stereotyping comes. For instance in describing the Indian's fighting as "clumsy", it is clear that the Indian is looked down upon as a person who cannot do anything physical. In fact Zollo goes on to call him an "Indian clown" (My Life in Prison, 79).

Another popular stereotype of the Indian that Kiriamiti utilizes is that of the Indian as a coward. This stereotype on Indian cowardice could be argued to emanate from colonial discourses in Kenya. In Weep Not Child (1964), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o captures this image of the Indians in colonial Kenya as cowards in several instances. For example, the Indians are so scared of Europeans that they even tremble in the presence of a white person:

> The Indians feared Europeans and if you went to a shop and a white man found you, the Indian would stop selling to you and trembling all over, would begin to serve him…while Black people had been conscripted into the army the Indians had utterly refused and had been left alone. It was rumoured that the white men in Kenya did not like them because they refused to go to war against Hitler. This showed that the Indians were cowards. The Africans were inclined to agree with this idea of Indian cowardice. (Weep Not Child, 7-8)

With constant replication, this image, just like other Indian stereotypical traits, has over the years gained currency within the Kenyan popular imagination. Perhaps one of the reasons for which the Indian has come to be perceived as a coward is because more often than not, he is cast as being guilty of one unlawful deal or another thus he dreads getting into trouble especially with the law. For instance, in a rather interesting incident Zollo sets out to go to Liberty Cinema to steal a car as advised by Mota Singh (the car dealer). Unfortunately immediately he opens the car door the Indian owner (who has also stolen it) appears. Although the Indian threatens to take Zollo to the police for attempted theft, the whole scenario is suddenly reversed and it is actually Zollo who, through blackmail, manages to scare the Indian eventually. The latter is so scared that he gives Zollo Shs. 4,000.00 and leaves the car to him because he feels that Zollo knows too much about him and he does not want to have the police involved. Zollo summarizes the entire encounter in rather stereotypical and hyperbolic terms. He says:

> *If ever you were asked to fetch a coward, just go round the town looking for a guilty Indian* and I assure you that you will win the first prize. Right then, this one was trembling so much that the window glasses where his arm rested vibrated loudly. Every element in his body showed fear…One thing I was sure of was, even if I hit him on the face right then he could not hit back. He was completely at my mercy. (My Life in Crime, 81; emphasis added)

It is worth mentioning here that notably Kiriamiti uses the term *Indian* for any *Asian* and rarely does he refer to them by their proper names. Alternatively, where *Indian* is dropped, either *Sikh* or *Singh* takes its place. This is characteristic of stereotyping where anyone belonging to the particular outgroup which is the target of the stereotype can fit into the already predetermined slot because members of a certain stereotyped group are taken to be all the same thus can swap places without changing the content of the text.[50]

However, in Congo Zollo befriends a certain rich Indian businessman (Hirji Shah) who owns big hotels both in Congo and in Kenya. Unlike other Indians who are cast as mean and cowardly, Hirji Shah is, contrary to popular imagination, very kind and generous to Zollo. In fact, it is Shah who gets Zollo 'the right papers' and a job as Stephano's chauffeur. Although the fact that Hirji is able to fake papers for Zollo casts him as corrupt like most other Indians, here Kiriamiti reverses the common stereotype of the Indian as mean, unscrupulous, avaricious and clinging to only his own people, to create a different type of character quite unusual to the reader.

Various researchers have observed that generally when stereotypes are reversed they become ambivalent and they tend to gain as much currency as when they are employed

[50] See Ojwang (2005).

according to the interpretive conventions of local readerships (Bhabha 1994; Brown and Barwick 1987; Sipalla 2004). Reversal of stereotypes is particularly important in crime and mystery writing according to John Reilly (1999:429). If the stereotyped character is useful in setting up expectations, particularly of trustworthiness or suspiciousness, then crime writers "have long realized that the reversal of stereotypes is a reliable route to creating the element of surprise so prized by their readers" (Reilly 1999:429). When Zollo and Hirji (then referred to as just an *Indian*) meet for the first time, the way in which the latter receives the former is so unusual hence surprising going by the popular discourses surrounding the Indian character within the Kenyan population. Zollo says of the unexpected encounter:

> Then, I came to know an Indian who owned a hotel there…I just happened to be in town one day, when I noticed a Mercedes Benz 280 with Kenyan registration numbers. I followed it until we reached a big hotel and as the driver parked it, I quickly parked mine beside his. When he too noticed my car's registration numbers, he came to me smiling broadly as if he had at last met his long-lost brother. He addressed me in Swahili, taking me into his arms as if he was overjoyed to meet me. (My Life in Crime, 102)

In spite of Hirji Shah's generosity and unusual Indian disposition, he still cannot escape skepticism from Zollo. At some point Zollo feels that Hirji is only good to him merely because they are Kenyans in a foreign country while at home they remain enemies. As much as Kiriamiti through Zollo presents to the reader Hirji as a slight alteration of the stereotypical myths about Indians, Zollo himself cannot escape his own cynicism about the Indian character. By so doing Kiriamiti is conforming to popular knowledge because if the crime genre's strength lies in its ability to actively interpellate the reader then Kiriamiti is obliged to tell the reader what she or he wants to hear.[51] Thus Kiriamiti

[51] See Fister, Barbara, "Copycat Crimes: Crime Fiction and the Market Place of Anxieties" (2005).

has to bring back into his representation of the Indian the stereotypes that are familiar to the implied reader. For example Zollo says of Hirji:

> Imagine an Indian supplying you with free lunch and accommodation in his hotel, any time you need it, just because you happened to be in a car with a Kenyan registration number in Congo! If you meet your enemy in a strange country where you need each other's assistance, be assured that you'll forget your enmity. This I have proved beyond reasonable doubt. (My Life in Crime, 134)

The third and final stereotype with which I am concerned in this chapter is gender stereotyping. Does Kiriamiti's crime story reinforce an image of male and female that still, to some extent, pervades the Kenyan urban society? Throughout both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison, Kiriamiti uses various popular images of both men and women. Gender stereotyping is not so much on the representation of men as it is on women. When women come into the criminal's life, they are there for his (mis)use. In fact women are used as 'status symbols' which define the kind of man one is. For example, when Zollo moves in to live with Wanjau, since this is his first home in Nairobi, he feels that he has become a 'big man': "It was a very nice room and I enjoyed the time I stayed in it. I was now becoming my own boss and depending on myself, bringing women home whenever I felt like it" (My Life in Crime, 14).

Throughout the texts, women are described in terms of physical beauty. This is often the stereotype of women as figures that can only be beautiful on the outside and not good in anything else. For illustration purposes, I will use the representation of Milly in Kiriamiti's texts. When Zollo first collects Milly's picture in Bahati, what really drives

him to go looking for her is the beauty that he sees in the picture (My Life in Crime, 39). On meeting Milly, Zollo says:

> One thing I have forgotten to tell you is that when I saw this girl, I realized the photo had not contained her whole beauty. She was the most attractive girl in all the groups that I had set my eyes on that day. She was about seventeen, with bright intelligent eyes, and a structure that matched her five feet four. When she smiled it was then that she showed her whole beauty… I felt for sure that I had at last met my Helen of troy. This girl looked feminine! (My Life in Crime, 40).

The language in which Milly is described focuses only on her physical beauty not only in the passage above but throughout the texts.

In his use of the stereotype, whether tribal, racial, or gender based, therefore, Kiriamiti taps into familiar and popular discourses to tell the story of the criminal in his encounters with several urban characters. In Kiriamiti's works therefore, stereotyping as an act of 'mapping' the human or cultural geography of the city, plays a crucial role in the criminal's work as an 'urban planner'. According to Susan Docherty, however, stereotypes in crime and mystery writing may be representative of the writer's own prejudice or may be used by an author to manipulate or inspire his readers (1999:20), both possibilities which I cannot rule out in both My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In the preceding four chapters I have addressed several issues on John Kiriamiti's works. I have attempted to follow Jack Zollo, the criminal figure in the two texts, from Nairobi's Eastleigh estate through River Road into Kagondo Bar, as I took *a walk through the criminal's city*. The focus in Chapter One has been on John Kiriamiti the writer and his works, particularly the two texts under study: My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison. Also in this chapter, I have attempted to give a general historical background into the ambivalence and ambiguity of law and order in both colonial and postcolonial Kenyan contexts. Additionally, I have provided a broad overview of the crime genre while at the same time trying to define a crime story in the African literary context. This second focus of Chapter One has been important in the contextualization of Kiriamiti's works within the crime genre because studying Kiriamiti as a crime writer rather than a mere urban novelist formed part of the study's rationale. Obviously, many Kenyan urban novelists, for example, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Thomas Akare among others, have included crime scenes in their novels because more often than not, crime is part of the urban lifestyle in the Kenyan novel. My contextualization of Kiriamiti's works in the crime genre therefore is justified because it would not be worth the effort to study Kiriamiti as just 'one-among-many-other' Kenyan urban novelists.

My literary inquiry into the peculiarity of John Kiriamiti's works most importantly took me through an examination of the fictional criminal figure. What struck me as rather

interesting is the way Jack Zollo, despite his criminal deals in the city, still wins the reader's sympathy and admiration throughout both texts. In line with this, I undertook a study of the various ways through which Kiriamiti as a writer sets out to (re)construct the criminal figure in such a way that he interpellates the reader. I have noted that, in fact the more reason Kiriamiti is able to do this is because his stories are based on tenets of the thriller. Since the reader demands action and more action, then the thriller hero must be as professional as he is likeable. It is Kiriamiti's techniques in creating a hero, which I have argued are modelled after the crime thriller, that have been the focus in Chapter Two.

In my reading of Kiriamiti's novels, I have also noted that the criminal has alternative epistemologies about the city that the ordinary city dweller does not. This is because owing to his 'freedom' to explore the urban space, the criminal is able to create space for himself where there is hardly any. In an economically divided city like Nairobi, Zollo can still find space for himself amongst the same people who are supposedly protecting themselves from crime and criminals. Through improvisation, Zollo has access to the same bars frequented by the state agents of law and order (the police), for example. In this exploration of the urban space the criminal figure then settles in these spaces and even goes further to personalize them to his advantage with the least or no suspicion. In Chapter Three, therefore I followed Jack Zollo through some of the urban spaces which he has personalized for his criminal deals. Hopefully, in this chapter I have showed that although the criminal contains forces of societal excess that cannot be contained within the urban space he actually remains in that same space through improvisation. For instance, Zollo and his gang may not be able to acquire a legal licence for an office in the city but through improvisation, they manage to mark Kagondo Bar as their office.

One other thing that can hardly go unnoticed in the two texts under study is the use of stereotypes as a way of mapping the city for the criminal. Throughout his criminal life in Nairobi, I have argued that Zollo heavily relies on stereotypes in order to deal with various individuals. What is most interesting in this representation of the criminal and the city is that sometimes stereotypes are often very faulty instruments of measurement of human behaviour and character but despite that, they seem to be effective for the criminal's use. Besides the use of stereotypes by Zollo as a criminal character, Kiriamiti as a writer equally uses stereotypes to comment on several issues resultantly manipulating his readers. Although these stereotypes may not be specific to the urban space, I have argued that in the Kenyan society, the city is a "convergence of many routes" (to use Refentse's words in Phaswane Mpe's Welcome to Our Hillbrow) and once people following these different routes meet in the city, stereotypes are bound to gain currency. I have analysed in Chapter Four Kiriamiti's use of racial, tribal and gender stereotypes to narrate the crime story.

But then what sets Kiriamiti's works apart from other Kenyan novels? What is Kiriamiti's contribution to the field of literature? The fact that Kiriamiti is a Kenyan urban novelist is obvious and that alone would not warrant this study. Similarly, it is indisputable that Kiriamiti's focus in both texts is crime in the city but still that does not really distinguish him from other writers because there are several other Kenyan writers writing on crime. Certainly, there is something about Kiriamiti that is worth literary attention otherwise there would be no need to dig into the archives to study for example My Life in Crime (published in 1984). As discussed in Chapter One and Two, Kiriamiti's contribution in the crime genre is enormous not only in Kenyan literature but in the crime genre generally. Particularly the less studied use of the criminal's point of view is a major turning point in the criticism of crime writing. The criminal's point of

view has been adopted before by the American author Chester Himes, for instance, but generally it has not received as much critical attention as the detective crime story for example.

Also Kiriamiti gives a rather different approach to the representation of the city, first because he unravels the city's underworld only accessible to the criminal and not to most other urbanites. Secondly, Kiriamiti presents to the reader a city that is a place of adventure and material success unlike other Kenyan novelists, who write of the city as a place of anguish and urban misadventures. His is a celebration of the urban space. Also, in this study I have been able to highlight various contradictions in Kiriamiti's writing. For example I examined the question of the heroic villain which is evident throughout Kiriamiti's works as mentioned earlier.

Additionally, throughout the study I have noted that crime and criminals are such ambivalent terms to define in the world of both texts. In a context where those who purport to be the judges of morality do not uphold any moral values themselves, issues of (im)morality then become volatile. However, I have defined Zollo as a criminal rogue who does not operate within the limits of law and order and who has a way of surviving within the same ordered urban space. A close connection between the 'free' urban space and prison also surfaced in this study. The prison appeared to me to be a microcosm of the city not only because Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, in which Jack Zollo serves part of his prison sentence is situated within Nairobi, but also because of the surveillance evident in both spaces. Also, like the 'free' city, the prison is a meeting point for strangers. No one really belongs to the prison whether it is the prison warders or the inmates. All prison inhabitants come from different corners of the country and

only meet as strangers behind prison walls. The prison is by this virtue a 'city' only that its surveillance is more open and visible than that of the 'free' city space.

Perhaps to appropriate the insights of the French philosopher Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison (1975), both the city and the prison in Kiriamiti's texts operate as a Panopticon. According to Foucault, within the Panopticon, a single guard can watch over many prisoners while the guard remains unseen. Although the criminal, knows that he is being observed, whether in or out of prison, there are certain undeniable controlling systems of power and knowledge (terms that Foucault often combines as "power-knowledge") within the urban space. As Foucault argues, there is a certain level of supervision (surveillance, application of norms of acceptable behaviour and so on) of some humans by others within the modern society. It is the ability of the criminal to transgress this supervision that makes Zollo the reader's hero.

In conclusion, I believe there are other fields of interest in the works of John Kiriamiti in particular but also on crime writing as a literary genre. It would be important to pursue certain other aspects of Kiriamiti's works and crime writing which I believe deserve immediacy but I could not delve into owing to the limited time and scope of my research project. For example, although I mentioned issues of women stereotyping in Chapter Four, I believe that is not all there is in gender representation in crime fiction or simply within the urban novel. It would be important to examine how these women offer themselves for representation. Do women use the same 'tongue' and terms that male characters and authors use to represent them? Does Susan Njeri, the barmaid in My Life in Crime, for example, view herself as an accomplice to the criminal? A clear

case in point would be reading the two texts under study alongside My Life with a Criminal: Milly's Story (later to be referred to as Milly's Story) in which Kiriamiti appropriates Milly's voice to narrate his life in crime. Does Milly speak of herself as Zollo speaks of her in My Life in Crime and My Life in Prison? If not, what issues of gender (de)voicing arise in the text? Another matter that would be important to explore in Kiriamiti's work in line with his writing of Milly's Story, would be why the author would rewrite the same story in My Life in Crime in the voice of another. Why does Kiriamiti deem it necessary to tell a single story in different voices and as two novels to be exact? How does that speak to issues of narration voice in crime writing?

It would be interesting also to interrogate certain discrepancies which arise between Kiriamiti's earlier works and his latter novels. I believe the earlier novels (My Life in Crime and Milly's Story) were perhaps written as mere personal memoirs or confessions while the latter works (My Life in Prison and the three fictional novels mentioned earlier) are influenced by Kiriamiti's stature as a literary author. What 'truths' then does Kiriamiti curve as a result of his already established position as a literary author? Is Kiriamiti only recording his life history or is he claiming his position within literary circles? These, among others, are just a few of the issues that perhaps one would want to investigate in reading Kiriamiti and the general crime genre.

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