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Romance, love and gender in times of crisis: HIV/AIDS in Kenyan popular fiction

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CHAPTER TWO

ROMANCE, GENDER AND STDs IN KENYAN POPULAR NOVELS IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

INTRODUCTION

Popular fiction of the 1970s and 1980s in Kenya dramatises the moral fabric of the society in the period immediately after independence with its social, cultural, economic and political complexities. This chapter is a general look at the representations of the themes of love, sex, gender, disease and romance in this fiction. The importance of this chapter in the thesis is to highlight how earlier popular literature in Kenya dealt with these issues. Therefore, the analysis I do here forms a background to the subsequent discussion in the rest of the thesis of these themes within the HIV/AIDS fiction of the 1990s.

Most of the writers who attempted to narrate the socio-cultural conditions in Kenya using discourses on love, romance and sex in the 1970s and 1980s were met with a lot of criticism. The underlying reason for this criticism was that such kind of literature would contribute to the corruption of the morals of Kenyans, particularly the youth.[1] Although in some cases writers use explicit sexual imagery, it is evident from the fiction that morality is also an element of their writing. The problem, however, is that writers fail to engage with morality clearly. The kind of language used and the kind of characters created do not convincingly portray the writers' message on morality. The chapter begins

[1] See Chris Wanjala (1980) and Bernth Lindfors (1991). Brian Larkin (2002) also records that popular literature in Nigeria was criticized for corrupting the morals of the youth (28-29).

by looking at how gender relations are represented in the novels. Since masculinity is a major determinant of how intimate relationships are conducted in the novels, I look at the different ways through which masculinity is constructed in these works. I then move on to discuss how attempts by men to establish control in romantic relationships and over women's bodies leads to the commodification of women. The final part of the chapter examines the representation of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) in the novels.

MASCULINITY, MALE SEXUAL ANXIETY AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

Common themes found in the Kenyan popular fiction of the 1970s and 1980s generally include love, romance, marriage, prostitution, masculinity, femininity, drunkenness, corruption, crime and urbanisation. It is important to point out that these themes are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to discuss one theme without referring to the other. Prostitution for instance is one of the themes that cannot be addressed outside of issues of gender, sex, sexuality, romance and love. It is also worth pointing out at the outset that prostitution is probably the most prominent theme within the Kenyan fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. Citing Gloria Chukukere (1995), Florence Stratton (1994) and Mary Oluassen (2002), Tom Odhiambo (2004) observes that "Whenever sex/sexuality is written about in the African novel, invariably the question of promiscuity and prostitution forms a significant element of this discourse because it has become one of the most important components of urban life in Africa" (93-94). Prostitution is a subject that captures the complexity of the urban moral economy in Kenya and most interesting is how it is intertwined in the politics of gender and sexuality. In the novels, prostitution is tied to questions of masculinity, femininity, love, romance and sexuality. In many

instances, masculinities are constructed around issues of wealth/money, sexual conquest and control, monogamy, polygamy and fatherhood. I refer to masculinity in the plural because various studies concerning sexuality and gender have shown that masculinities vary not only over time but also according to setting and the people involved. For instance, In *Dislocating Masculinity*, Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne argue that "notions of masculinity, like the notion of gender itself are fluid and situational [and therefore] we must always consider the various ways people understand masculinity in any particular setting" (1994: 3). This then implies that masculinities change over time due to changing environments. For example, as I show in the discussion of the HIV/AIDS fiction, HIV/AIDS has affected the many ways of "being a man" that are considered important in the fiction of the 1970s and 1980s.

As I have stated above, sexual conquest and control is a major determining factor of what it means to be a man in these novels. Many male protagonists are promiscuous whether they are married or single. They have sex with different and almost any woman they meet especially prostitutes. Fredrick Wamatu (popularly Known as Fred by his fiends) in Charles Githae's *A Worm in the Head* asks almost every woman he meets for sex. He says that him and his friend Jack are "real bird chasers" (2) and whenever they bought women beer, the women had to pay by sleeping with them (4). In addition, Fred maintains: "I don't like falling in love with women and leaving them without a lay. Makes me feel cheated. After all, what I call love between a woman and a man cannot be called real until there is that body union" (262). When he becomes a policeman, he remembers Gladys who was once his girlfriend and says he will arrest her "for being his

girl but leaving him without a lay. I will arrest her and fine her one lay" (46). For him, love and romance amount to sex. But this "love and romance" do not last long as he keeps losing his girlfriends due to his promiscuity. Because of his love for "sexual variety", he resolves to have short-lived relationships with women in order to avoid being tied down: "All the relationships I had with women were temporary to me and I had no intention of getting married to any of them. There was plenty of time to romp about before I got myself tied to the nagging life of a husband" (123). He adds that he loves polygamy (133).

Commenting on Ali Kamau's promiscuity the narrator in *The Minister's Daughter* says: "you cannot blame him, can you? A bachelor must be given time to look around. He must be given time to make a few mistakes before making the final mistake of his career, plunging into married life" (56). Men are so obsessed with sex such that Dod Kiunyu in *Son of Woman* is willing to abscond from school because he has been promised "a lay" (55). Sexual variety is the main ingredient of sexual conquest. Thus Dod declares: "Me, I don't believe in one woman.… I like to have a bird here and another there just in case one of them happens to lay an egg when I am in the tumbling mood. If you are the type that sticks to one woman, you should have your apparatus examined" (8-9). For Dod, having one woman is unmanly. Diki in *No!* believes that "a man must have a change of diet[2]. Another woman besides your wife was always a delight – warmer, more understanding, and… well, they made you feel important" (46-47). In *Unfit for Human Consumption,* Kinama does not like his wife staying for long when she comes visiting

[2] The need for a "change of diet" for men, by having sex with as many women as possible, points to the representation of women's bodies as items for consumption by men. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

him in town: “he found it very inconvenient to live with his wife because, as he complained, she locked him up in the house and there was not time left for him to visit his girls” (16). Kazungu, in Muruah’s *Never Forgive Father* has refused to marry because “he could not stand the sight of the same woman day in, day out, for a week, without his falling dead with boredom. He loved variety, he said, and the prospect of living with the same woman for the rest of his life frightened him insane” (61). Diki is also a good example of this type of male promiscuity. He is described as “a big civil servant with lots of girls around him. He was a fucker, bad luck for his employer, but the employer should’ve checked his cards well and decided whether he wanted a diligent people’s servant or a fucker” (39-40). Diki himself confesses that “kissing, fucking and drinking” (34) are his game. He does all this while neglecting his office work. He spends most of the time thinking about women and flirting with those in his office. He is presented as a man consumed with a passion for sex above anything else. There is constant reference to him “squeezing his sexual equipments” (40, 42); laughing with his “testicles trembling” (45) when he is in the company of a woman and even having an erection at the thought of women – but not his wife (47). When he is angry, Diki “felt as though his testicles were burning (77). His wild sexuality has been with him for long. He remembers his childhood days when he used “to follow school girls or Sunday school girls for a fuck which he rarely got” (52). To satisfy his sexual urges, he recalls how he “occasionally made love to goats and sheep when he was looking after them” (53). He also remembers how he used to “perform many services for his girl pupils” (54). He compares those days of lack with his present situation: “What a difference! Lots of money for himself; lots of women; a herd which was too big for him to mount. He only chose the most beautiful ones among

those at his disposal" (53). Diki's sexuality is compared to that of a bull; he has too many cows at his disposal. As if to further assert his obsession with sex, Sofi, one of his lovers, refers to him as a bull, "you are a spoilt bull," (43) she tells him. Kinama in Unfit *for Human Consumption* prides in being sexually competent and even refers to himself as a cock (49). When he gets in a fight with Maruka, it is described as if two bulls were fighting (37). [3]

The image of a bull and a cock depict Kinama and Diki as men who are consumed by their obsession with sex and will therefore not let women rest. The men in these narratives are constantly in search of sex and intimacy and apparently without rational reasons or justifications being offered by their stories (see Odhiambo 2004: 101). The animalistic images used to describe male sexuality symbolise not only sexual irresponsibility, rage and power, but also danger. The reference to men as bulls and cocks displays their irrational sexual behaviour which often leads to social and physical consequences such as death, loss of jobs, broken marriages and STDs. When Diki's wife suspects that he is cheating on her and follows him to Sofi's house, he attempts to hit her but she dodges the blow and he ends up hitting the side window and consequently wounding his hand seriously. However, there are other men who do not escape with mere injuries like Diki. Washington Ndava in *No!* is one such man. Ndava is a wealthy civil servant: "a powerful man with many influential connections. He bought beer generously for everybody. And he provided women for many men" (13). Among other women,

[3] The reference to men's sexuality using animal imagery is also extended in the HIV/AIDS fiction. In chapter three, I discuss how the metaphor of the bull is used in Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague* to critique men's irresponsible sexual behaviours in the face of HIV/AIDS.

Ndava has an affair with his personal secretary [Brigita] who is married to Samson Mbithi a personnel officer in the department headed by Ndava. Ndava is a womanizer. He follows Brigita day and night and gives her money to seduce her while harassing her husband by giving him many assignments and several temporary transfers. On one occasion, Ndava sends Mbithi to Mombasa with the intention to propose marriage to Brigita. Ndava is almost certain that Brigita will leave her husband for him because he is wealthy: “This evening, he wanted to charm her into divorcing Mbithi for him. You know, when you are rich you want all the nice things to come to you. This is human of course. He planned to give her a cheque of one thousand shillings so that she could buy what she wanted (23-24). Brigita actually likes him because of his wealth: “Sometimes it had been difficult for her to resist him. Brigita… was a woman who loved riches” (87). So when Ndava writes her a “cheque of one thousand shillings to buy herself anything she wanted” (90), Brigita cannot resist him and is ready for a romantic evening with him. But then the plan goes wrong. As they are making love, three men break into the house and cut off his ears and his penis. They also beat him severely (95). Although Ndava’s wife tries to understand his predicament, she feels that “she had a duty to herself. She wanted a whole man”, a man who could satisfy her sexually (111-112). As a result, she starts sleeping with other men.

With the loss of his penis, Ndava feels that he has lost not only the ability to perform his sexuality but also his manhood. Since the most important symbol of his masculinity is gone, he is no longer interested in material wealth. He tells the wife, “take everything I have and leave me alone to carry my wretched body through the jungles of this world”

(111). He feels that the wealth cannot redeem his lost masculinity signified by the loss of his penis. In her essay "In Pursuit of the Perfect Penis: The Medicalization of Male Sexuality" (1994) Leonore Tiefer shows how male gender is consolidated by sexuality arguing that in men, gender appears to lean on sexuality (316). She argues that, for instance, "an impotent man always feels that his masculinity, and not just his sexuality is threatened" (316). Consequently part of conceptions of masculinity centres on penis performance (315). The body therefore becomes very important in the performing of masculinity.[4] Again, it becomes clear that factors that account for masculine identity overlap with each other. Having lost his pride due to loss of his manhood, Ndava does not have the will-power to live. His attempts to commit suicide on several occasions fail leaving him more disfigured although he finally kills himself by crushing his car against a wall. A similar fate befalls Kinama in *Unfit for Human Consumption.*

Kinama, like Ndava is a civil servant – although in a lower position. He is a morally corrupt officer and a womaniser. Kinama gets into a fight with his roommate Maruka after having sex with his [Maruka's] girlfriend Anita. Kinama is seriously injured and admitted to hospital for two months. When he is about to be discharged from hospital, he has plans to change his life by becoming religious (42-43). However, after getting his salary, all the plans to buy a Bible, a Hymn book and a bed are forgotten. "He felt so rich" (46), we read, and all he thinks about is sex and alcohol. Kinama goes to a bar to drink with friends. He picks up a prostitute who encourages him to drink more. Later on

[4] Indeed the body is an important determinant of how men perform their sexuality and masculinity. In the HIV/AIDS fiction that I discuss, men whose bodies are infected with HIV/AIDS are not seen as able to perform their masculinity adequately. I discuss this point further in reference to the representation of romance in *The Last Plague*.

in the night the two hire a room and while Kinama is fast asleep, Lily steals his two months' salary and disappears, leaving him with six shillings only. The following morning, still in a drunken state, Kinama tries to look for Lily but only ends up drinking more to drown his sorrows. He goes to his office while drunk and explains to Ochwada, his boss, that he was drunk because one of his twin babies had died. But as fate would have it, his wife Dorcas who has come to Nairobi looking for him bursts into the office with the two babies. A verbal exchange starts between the two, with Dorcas accusing Kinama of neglecting her and the children while spending all his money on prostitutes. Embarrassed, Kinama runs out of the office and his wife follows him to Ofafa Maringo where he lives. When Dorcas insists that he explains how he spent his two-month salary, he lies that he was mugged by thieves and promises to borrow money from his colleagues the following day. He goes to the office the following morning, only to discover that he has been sacked. He decides he has had enough of life and commits suicide.

Right from when we meet Kinama, he is portrayed as a man who loves women, alcohol and money. At the beginning when he is waiting at the bank for his salary, what interests him other than the excitement of getting money is the sexual desirability and appeal of the body parts of the women in the bank. He can even pick out the smell of sex from some of the women: "And there was the smell of sex especially from some of the women…. However, such sex smell could only be detected by some experts like Jonathan Kinama who had great experience in women" (5). As if to affirm his competence in the knowledge of sex, he comments on those women he thinks are "fit for human consumption":

> Kinama's eyes rested on one girl, yes, that one – a fat girl armed with huge breasts and highly pronounced buttocks, obviously soft and comfortable, luxurious…. A bird that fitted too well in her mini dress…. Kinama calculated in his mind and passed her as a sexy bird…. Her eyes met his and he quickly looked away… but not before he had managed to have a glance at her lips: full lips which seduced his for a kiss. He licked his lips…. Kinama's ideal girl for sex satisfaction and romance was a plump girl with shoulders that arched nicely and intoxicating breasts like those ones. Man, this one, he thought, this one is very fit for human consumption!'…. 'Delicious!', he thought and began surveying her legs, then her hips and… 'Just there!' He thought and his penis began rising. (5-7)

After giving us this panoptic description in which women are clearly portrayed as objects of male admiration and desire, Kinama extends his sexual gaze and gives women various names: "sexy bird'" "delicious dish" and "human butterfly". He fantasises about these women and it is as if he "'sexually devours' the women that his eyes finally settle on" (Odhiambo 2004: 103). All women emit sexual images and thoughts from him (*Unfit for Human Consumption,* 10, 11, 12. 17, 18). One evening when he is with Anita, "as he pumped the stove he was thinking of fucking her" (21). In many other instances, there is reference to him having an erection as he laughs, looks or talks to a woman (7, 20, 50) just like Diki in *No*!

Maggie O'Neill (2001) has written on the commodification of women through the male gaze. She uses Laura Mulvay's theorisation on scopophilia[5] to discuss male pleasure in looking. Note here that looking in these novels is a male function and the women

[5] O'Neill defines scopophilia as "the basic human need to look at others that causes feelings related to lust and fulfilment" (139)

function as what O'Neill refers to as "erotic objects for the male [characters] to gain scopophilic pleasure" (140). She notes that the scopophilic gaze is problematic, although this can be corrected:

> The scopophilic gaze is not unproblematic. Within the psychoanalytic framework, for the male spectator 'woman' signifies sexual difference and also lack of penis, which is related to 'unpleasure'. (Lack of penis symbolizes castration). Male pleasure in looking can always be potentially destabilized through the anxiety women signify, i.e., 'unpleasure'. This can be remedied by eliminating the threat of castration women signify by taking control of the visual representation of woman and also denying woman's lack of penis by the use of fetish objects that signify penis – high heels/earrings – turning her into a fetish object herself, fragmenting her into body parts. (140)[6]

In the novels discussed in this chapter, it is the bodies of women that are made prominent. These bodies are talked about in parts rather than in the whole: buttocks, breasts, lips, legs, eyes and thighs, making women the object of male desire. According to Moira Gatens (1996) the representation of the female body in fragments depicts it as ready for consumption, to be taken in bit at a time (24). Writing on the mother Africa trope in male-authored texts, Florence Stratton (1994) argues that "woman herself is produced or constructed by the male writers as an embodiment of his literary/political vision…. So constructed, woman is defined as her body, as her sexuality" (51).[7] In addition, Stratton

[6] See Moira Gatens (1996: 33- 34) also for a discussion on scopophilia.

[7] Citing prominent writers like Wole Soyinka, Nurrudin Farah, Mongo Beti, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Cyprian Ekwensi, Sembene Ousmane, Thomas Akare and Meja Mwangi, Stratton points out that "many male authors people (or woman) their texts with prostitutes" (53). "In these texts", she posits, "prostitution is not related to the female social condition in patriarchal societies. Rather, it is a metaphor for men's degradation under some non-preferred socio-political system – a metaphor which encodes women as agents of moral corruption, as sources of moral contamination in society" (53).

conceives that the female body becomes an object of the male gaze. Men claim mastery of women's bodies and therefore their power over these bodies (51). Part of this mastery over women's bodies is based on the economic power that men hold over women. Women in the texts appear to be for sale; specifically, body parts become sexual commodities. Thus when he gets his salary, all Kinama thinks of is the woman he had been admiring: "Kinama counted the notes with trembling hands. It was correct. He pushed it in his tweed coat pocket. He sighed as he walked out, thinking of the girl. He coughed and thought, 'now I've become a man again, where's she?" (8). Money makes him feel 'manly' and therefore restores his belief that he can get any woman he wants.

The success of relationships between men and women in the novels is predicated on how much money a man has. The man has to strive to please the woman materially. The narrator in *A Worm in the Head* compares women to cars. He tells us that it is easier to run cars than women because to run a woman a man must always have money (5). From such representations, women, and consequently their sexuality, become commoditised, through the connection of sexual desire with money.[8] In a sense they are turned into "prostitutes" who will sleep with any man as long as he has money. Relationships between men and women become commoditised also and the more money a man has, the more (sexual) relationships he will have with women. For male characters, money becomes the essence of love, often viewed as what will guarantee the survival of any

[8] This claim, however, should not be taken to suggest that women do not have any agency in the novels and that money converts them into non-thinking, non-rational beings. On the contrary, there are women, like Eunice in *The Minister's Daughter*, who amass some semblance of power by manipulating standards of masculinity. They take advantage of the economic power men hold by willingly choosing to trade sex for a share of their wealth.

desired romantic relationship. In *A Worm in the Head*, When Esther leaves Fred for another man, he thinks "she must have been lured by money" (238) and supposes "maybe I was not giving her enough monetary gifts" (238). The special sex appeal of wealth is important to a configuration of successful masculinity for the male characters such that to have control over women's bodies – and hence feel secure – in a relationship, the man must have money. However, some of the women are also drawn to the men partly because of the money they have.[9] Kinama says that he could not compete with Maruka for Anita because Maruka gave her a lot of money and he did not have such money to give her (14). But since Anita loves men with money, he knows that he can have sex with her when Maruka is away: "he had calculated her morals and knew that being what she was, a kind of prostitute in this case, she would not resist a good deal of bribe" (17). When he thinks of the "edible" (31) typist Susy, he knows he will not get her easily since "she had no time for people like Kinama anyway. She was a secret girl of Ochwada and she loved being taken out by big people, people with cars" (31). In *No*! Beti, Diki's secretary "had a reputation of seducing the senior members of the staff. And in fact, Beti had slept with all the big men of that department" (33). In *The Minister's Daughter*, Eunice Wangeci is also typical of women who enter into relationships with men depending on how much money they have: "her boyfriend Lewis Maranga had such a fat account in the bank…. Eunice liked this account. It was the bond that joined her to Lewis" (89). Eunice is presented as a wicked, calculating and untrustworthy woman who

[9] There are few exceptions to this analysis though. For example, Charity, Fred's girlfriend in A *Worm in the Head* is not interested in his money. Fred says that Charity fed him "without even asking for subsistence…. I had repeatedly tried to offer her money to buy the foods but she had bluntly refused my offers and even one day, she almost lost her temper when I went to her house with a pound of meat…. She just looked at me, looked at the still wrapped piece of meat and told me: 'Fred, I can afford all the meat that I need in this house'" (86). All Charity wants is a man who is loving and faithful to her.

uses men to her advantage. She withholds sex from Lewis in order to "catch" him by pretending to be a virgin, and hence a "good girl": "Eunice Wangeci played her cards well. She impressed Lewis Maranga in every way. She did not smoke. She did not drink. She did not do anything else. The perfect girl-friend. The sweetest thing around. Charming, well dressed, well mannered. Lewis was impressed, very impressed" (59).

While withholding sex from Lewis, she is involved in sexual relationships with other men. She particularly likes Ali Kamau because "he has a good title and a good education. Above all, he was a great spender. He could give a girl a nice time. Eunice liked to have a good time with mysterious men" (58). Women therefore are seen to use their sexuality to entice and use men.[10] As a "kind of prostitute" Anita loves money and is well versed in the subject of seduction and is described as a "professor" on the subject (23). What can also be inferred from Wangeci's and Anita's representations is that the construction of masculinity as dependent on wealth is also aided by women as they too value the importance of wealth in forming romantic relationships. This is showed to be true for prostitutes who are depicted as only interested in exploiting men economically. The narrator in *A Tail in the Mouth* says, "Prostitutes are blood suckers. They'd suck your blood. They'd suck you to the bone and please don't talk to me about them" (277). These women [prostitutes] are characterized as only interested in men's money. Fred complains, "Prostitutes are always having Guinness and soda. I guess its because both drinks

[10] Women can also use their sexuality to punish unfaithful lovers. When Charity finds Fred being unfaithful to her, she pretends to want to make love to him, but when she has him all worked up and ready, she storms out of the house leaving him in agony (*A Worm in the Head*, 114-116). After Mwangi leaves Njoki to spend the night with another woman, she thinks of a way to make him pay, "She'd pretend she has not been offended. Next time they met, she'd fire him into burning desire. She'd get him so worked up he'd scream. She'd tell him to cool his rod on the metal frame of the bed; or go to the woman with the king-size sex" (*Never Forgive Father*, 34).

combined cost a little more than the other beers and the only thing that the greedy and merciless prostitutes want to see is the empty wallet of a buyer" (*A Worm in the Head*, 106). He adds, "These women [prostitutes] can never go hungry as long as there is a man who has an active prick around" (108). The two quotations suggest that although prostitutes are blamed for spending men's money, men too cannot stay away from them because they fail to control their sexual urges. Again, the discourses by men on women show that there is an interrelationship between prostitution, sexuality and the organisation of desire. Shannon Bell (1994) writes about the contradictory representation of the prostitute figure by society:

> At conscious and unconscious levels, we hold contradictory images of the prostitute body; the prostitute as the diseased physical and moral body; the prostitute as the sexual deviant …; the prostitute as an urban blight signifying a diseased city, the prostitute as the mother body; the prostitute as the criminal; the prostitute as the physically abnormal body; and the prostitute as the desublimed sexual woman. (71)[11]

As an object of desire, the prostitute is represented in this fiction as a sexual object with nothing to offer a man except sex and pleasure. In *A Worm in the Head*, Njagi tells Fred "I have a specimen in my house bearing new registration numbers but I am yet to test the engine and the driver comfortability…" (134). And Fred adds,

> Njagi was telling me about the new 'car' as we dubbed women. The bodywork was perfect, not many dents and did not appear to have refilled after any accident.

[11] Also see Annemarie Van Niekerk (2004) for a discussion of the ambivalent role the female, and the prostitute consequently, has been historically assigned in literature.

> No visible blemishes but he had not opened the bonnet yet to check on the engine. But he hoped the engine would be clean if not perfect. (135)

Fred himself talks about performing an "ante-mortem" (92) with women or "trying them out" (119). In *A Tail in the Mouth,* Kagwe says to his friends, "You know what…Kamau is a very decent chap but he's got a problem. A big problem that wears tits" (194-195) and concludes "to tell you the truth, I can't stand them [women] except in bed" (195). In *Never Forgive Father,* when Njoki fails to meet Mwangi as arranged, he does not feel offended because in his opinion, "there was plenty of beef going and all at throwaway prices" (34). In fact Njoki complains that Mwangi always talked about sex "as if he was buying goods from a shop: "Are you delivering the goods to me", he'd say. If she hesitated he'd start undressing her, all the time saying, "it is not salt that will melt and disappear, is it?" (34). At other times he would change the metaphor, "You know this is a sheep that you slaughter and sell and at the end of it the sheep is still there to be slaughtered and sold again and again" (34). While Diki is touching Beti's breasts in his office, we are told that "she stood there like a generous cow" (57). Dod complains that "the bitch [his girlfriend] was pretending to be mine and mine alone while secretly letting the bloody butcher work some overtime on what I considered *my goods*" (10, emphasis added). This is how Fred describes one of his sexual experiences:

> I roused myself from a drunken stupor in the night. My sodden brain could not recall or locate where I was…. I felt movement next to me. I moved my hand stealthily and noticed that I was completely naked before I touched the warm naked belly of a woman… at my touch, she cooed in her sleep and nudged closer, parting her legs slightly. Although I had no idea who she was, I felt my prick rear like a striking cobra…. I did not dare open my stinking mouth but a movement

> with my hips suggested to her just what I wanted. She spread herself and I reached for *the goods which I found to be warm and tender*. (20, emphasis added)[12]

The language of "cars, beef, goods, sheep and cow", items that men consume, purchase and own, characterise the portrayal of women in this fiction signaling men's understanding of their relationships with women. Many of the novels represent men's consumption of leisure through the purchase of alcohol and women. In *Across the Bridge*, Chuma tells us that his friend Kisinga "even paid the love fee for me or offered me his left-overs" (79). In *Never Forgive Father*, Kariuki and Mwangi "'hunted' girls together. Several times they had shared the same girl for the night" (104). After Chuma and his friends successfully rob a bank, his friend Kisinga recommends that he sleep with two girls to commemorate his "initiation into the world of heroes" (123). Chuma himself says "I wanted a woman with whom to celebrate. I approached the one with two mountainous breasts" (128). Clearly, men's understanding of intimacy and sex within the urban social context is viewed as a commodity that can be shared in pursuit of their leisure. Women are there to enhance their leisure activities.

In addition, the vocabulary of sale, purchase and consumption that is used in reference to sex and women's bodies depicts women as unable to negotiate for sex equally with men who are economically advantaged over them. In *Going Down River Road*, Wini laments

[12] Other than the reference to women's body parts as 'goods', note here also that Fred does not even know the woman he is having sex with. In another instance also, when his girlfriend catches him red-handed having sex with another woman, he cannot even remember the name of the woman he was sleeping with: "Then something struck my head. I realized that I did not even know who the woman was. I had even forgotten that name that she had told me." (114). In these novels, men take great risks to get sex and risk-taking becomes another factor in imagining and performing masculinity. In other words, they are explorers and will stop at nothing in search of sexual satisfaction despite the dangers that may be involved.

about the ordeal of hunting for a job. “It is murder”, she says, “everybody wants to lay you before they fail you on the interview…. And when they do it to you first time… they will always want to lay you. First the messenger and his brother, the director, personnel manager, every bastard. It gets to be blackmail. You either comply or forfeit your job” (74). Instead of sympathising, Ben laughs and thinks, “He never had anything against the system where one paid for what one got. He was used to it” (74).

From Ben’s comment, one can argue that the “commodification of women’s bodies is premised upon capitalist exchange relations” (O’Neill 2001: 139) and subsequently, sexploitation of women is blamed on economic changes where people pay for everything they get. In addition, women’s bodies are converted into articles of mass consumption and viewed as part of the items in the culture of consumption. It is this kind of language used to describe women generally, that makes prostitution and hence prostitutes seem undesirable in the novels. These gendered discourses on women reflect the anxieties of a predominantly male group in an urban environment who are out to prove their masculinity by seeking control over the bodies and sexual choices of urban women. This position of control by the male is enhanced by the silence of the female. Women are not given the space to speak their views in these novels. Generally, women as wives, girlfriends and lovers are passive and exist on the margins of the main narratives mainly told by male protagonists. Lars Johansson’s (1992) comment regarding Meja Mwangi’s novels summarises the treatment of women and the portrayal of romantic relationships in a majority of the fiction I refer to. He says:

> In a sense, women are absent from Meja Mwangi's novels. They are there as wives, girlfriends, prostitutes, but in the background, seen as some inert material which men use when it comes their way. Signs of deep affection are the exception rather than the rule. The absence of feelings is replaced by an emphasis on the visual characteristics of the women encountered. (46).[13]

As I have shown in the cases of Ndava, Dickson, Fred and Dod, most of these novels narrate failed romances (and marriages), which generally result from the promiscuity of male partners. Milly, in John Kiriamiti's *My Life with a Criminal: Milly's Story*, Jane Njeri in *The Minister's Daughter* and Rita in *What a Husband*! suffer a similar fate; that of having lying and unfaithful mates. The wives and children of the main protagonists appear in the narratives as undesirable sources of responsibility and a burden from which the different male characters are running away by seeking solace in alcohol and prostitutes. The writers use (artificial) romantic love as the springboard into an analysis of diverse issues concerning masculinity and femininity, prostitution, gender, sex, sexuality and marriage. Love contracts are not taken seriously and are frequently entered into in an abrupt, almost heedless manner. "Love at first sight" is commonly used by writers to describe most of these relationships. But once they enter into marriage, life

[13] The emphasis on visual characteristics as I have noted serves to portray women as objects to be desired and consumed by men. Although men chase after women in the novels, the women are blamed for exploiting men's finances. The writers do not address the reasons why some of the women opt to exchange sexual favours for money. Instead, prostitutes in the novels are depicted within the sociological framework which sees them as morally degenerate or within discourses that seek to project them as national metaphors of moral decay. In *Never Forgive Father*, Njoki decries "the popular belief … that the prostitute was generally a lazy, sex-crazy woman who spent her time drinking people's beers and eventually robbed them when they were too drunk to remember whom they had been drinking with" (235). Njoki's narration of the forces that lead her into prostitution offers a better understanding of the socio-economic conditions that drive women into prostitution, a subject that many of the writers do not adequately address.

becomes different as the couple learns that they cannot live on passion alone.[14] As I have noted, many men cannot deal with marital demands and expectations and often resort to alcohol to escape from marital problems and responsibilities. The men also turn to other women especially prostitutes for sexual satisfaction and companionship. At the end, when the relationships fail to work, they blame it on alcoholism, prostitutes or their lovers/wives. Men are seen as reasserting, rather than negotiating their positions of power and domination over women. Most of the writers perpetuate masculinist conceptions of relationships where men reserve the duty to make decisions in relationships for themselves. Masculinist conceptions of relationships revolve around faithfulness and monogamy. However, men demand that their women remain faithful to them and monogamous even though they themselves are not.

The situation of failed romances and dysfunctional marriages is complicated by the fact that many of the characters involved in these romances and marriages – and the society at large – still hold onto the notion of the implicit freedom of men allowing them to be involved in multiple sexual relationships while a woman is expected to be faithful to one man. Almost without exception in this literature, men in romantic relationships, whether married or unmarried, are unable to remain faithful even when they swear /declare to themselves and/or their partners that they will be faithful. Talking about his girlfriend

[14] Unlike the traditional western romance where the couple is introduced to the reader before marriage and the story ends with the exchange of vows where readers are told the couple 'lived happily ever after', in African romance fiction the writers deviate from this depiction of romance and take the reader into the couple's married life. This is not to deny the fact that there are those writers who faithfully follow the traditional western romance formula. For many African writers however, the meaning of love and romance only becomes clear as the couple enters into married life. In the characterisations and interactions between female and male protagonists before and after the exchange of their marriage vows, they find out that romance and marriage may mean different things and not just physical attraction. There is the need for commitment as a father or mother, a parent and a husband or wife.

Faith, Sam in *A Tail in the Mouth* says: “we were so much in love that if I tried to explain how, you wouldn’t understand. You simply cannot explain such love. You have to experience it” (11) but immediately after that the girlfriend catches him with a French prostitute whom he had spent the night with at a lodging (11). Fred Wamatu in *A Worm in the Head* promises he would not have sex with another woman and plans to hasten the day he will marry Charity as she was the most beautiful woman (105) but after she finds him red-handed in bed with another woman, his admiration suddenly changes: “I looked at her. All her beauty was completely lost to me then. I saw her just like any of the hundreds of women that pass on the streets” (118). Finally, the romanticised relationship between Charity and Fred does not take long to disintegrate as in many other cases.

What is also interesting in the narration of these romantic relationships is that women are sometimes blamed or made to feel guilty and even apologise for the unfaithfulness and failure of their husbands or lovers. After Willie Wamae’s wife leaves him because he was neglecting the family, he brings a prostitute home and as if to clear himself of any possibility of guilt he warns:

> The wife who leaves her husband makes one gigantic mistake. A man cannot go on living alone like this. A man is an animal, a brute. Never leave your man alone, especially if you intend to come home afterwards. If you leave your man alone, you must not concern yourself with what he will do or what he will not do. It is a fair warning. (116)

According to Wamae, the man’s biological instincts that draw him irresistibly to other women is given as his reason for bringing a prostitute home. The wife is portrayed as

inconsiderate of the husband's biological needs. Similarly, after Ndava has his penis cut off and his wife gets involved in a sexual relationship with another man, she is made to look unkind and unconcerned with her husband's fate yet it was his unfaithfulness that led to his problems. In *Across the Bridge*, although Chuma is in love with Caroline, he blames her for everything that goes wrong in their relationship and for every problem that he faces including his criminal activities. At one point he laments, "Everybody in the village now knew what had happened. I was branded a thief. A woman had made me steal" (58), while in essence Chuma wants to get money because he believes this will make Caroline love him. In another episode, after he and his friends successfully rob a bank, Kisinga tells him: "see what a hero you are… You have made things happen. You caused ambulances to scream in the streets, police sirens to wail, crowds of people to gather, doctors to be awoken at night…" (126). But while Kisinga sings praises to him for being a tough guy, Chuma is not as happy and blames Caroline: "it was because of her. Caroline was responsible for all those things. I wondered how much more I was going to do because of her" (126). The only difference between Chuma and a man like Ndava is that whereas Chuma is in pursuit of Caroline because he earnestly loves her, the others are driven by sexual lust. In *What a Husband*! when Dennis comes back home after having left his wife for another woman, he makes it seem her fault that he was unfaithful. Rather than ask for forgiveness, he demands it and is sure that the wife will accept him back. Without doubt his wife asks him no questions:

> "'Rita'…. 'Will you always do what I ask you to do? So long as I am reasonable?' … 'Dennis', she says, 'I have never known what you have wanted me to do'. I move in. My mind goes back to that car of mine but I don't have time

> to think. Rita and I embrace each other. I kiss her ferociously. She just comes and keeps coming. We fall in a heap on a sofa and stay here. We embrace each other more but this does not satisfy our hearts. We go back to kissing and that does not satisfy our hearts either. Love comes naturally – emotional, uninhibited love. After that Rita cries beautifully. (177-178)

It becomes clear that women are expected to accommodate and even forgive their husbands' and lovers' infidelity without questioning their actions.

From the foregoing, I argue that there is need to understand how unequal gender relations within romantic and marital relationships affect the way sexuality manifests itself in contemporary Kenyan society. Social, cultural and economic factors affect how men and women experience their gender and sexuality in these novels. Consequently, sexuality and gender are linked by cultural, economic and social factors. The argument that there is a link between economic, social and cultural factors in society and the experience of gender, sex and sexuality, provides insight into the economic and social context within which risky behaviour occurs and how vulnerable groups – like those of women and prostitutes – are created. As I attempt to show in the succeeding section, socio-economic and cultural factors determine men's and women's experience of STDs.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

So far, one can deduce that there are two important elements that determine and affect the lives of protagonists and several other characters in this fiction: sex and romance on the one hand and alcohol on the other. These two elements are closely linked to prostitution

and consequently both private and public morality. Commercialised sex then becomes a core component of the alcohol and STDs equation.

I have already demonstrated above that men blame women for failed romances and marriages. Another important area where women are blamed by men concerns STDs. I therefore find it important to discuss how the writers analysed represent STDs in the novels. I have noted that in these novels barmaids and generally women in bars are taken to be prostitutes who are only after men's money and wealth and merely use sex as a means to entice and attract men. Prostitutes are characterised as confusing men leading to breakups in romantic and marital unions. Regarding disease, women (mainly prostitutes) are blamed for infecting men with STDs. When Lewis Maranga complains that he is starved for sex and his friend Bethwell suggests that he pick a barmaid from the bar next door, he says: "But I don't think I really want to associate myself with a barmaid. I care very much about Eunice. She loves me dearly. She thinks of me only. Besides, there is a health factor to consider. Barmaids are indiscriminate. I am very careful about my health, Bethwell" (*The Minister's Daughter*, 61). After Dusman catches 'flu', as STDs were referred to, he "wished he had bought himself some food with the five shillings he had given to the woman in exchange for her terrible flu" (*The Cockroach Dance*, 122). STDs are also referred to as "woman trouble" (ibid, 117). Men at Dr. Patel's clinic where Dusman seeks medical help are said to be suffering from "the same after-effects of a good time they had had with … ladies" (115). Meja Mwangi also writes about the time of the 'Nylon Scare'[15], a period when "men were not having concubines for fear of coming

[15] The author describes this as "the epidemic of a disease that never was. *Nylon* had allegedly been presented to bar women in the port of Mombasa by strange, doubledecked sailors landing from the Far East

down with the terrible disease" (90) and also a time when "men steered clear of lodging houses and bar girls hungered for the action and money" (231). Clearly, prostitutes are blamed for the transmission of diseases and, as I show later in the subsequent chapters, HIV/AIDS. The male denial of responsibility which initially coincided with the spread of STDs has been extended to HIV/AIDS, making its spread fatal.

It is also worth noting that STDs are seen as consequences of promiscuity. Men who get infected are promiscuous, although the blame is placed on the "wayward" women they have sex with. After losing his job, Dod says:

> I started to hit the bottle…. I simply drank myself silly every evening and went to the office late with my constant friend, Mr. Hangover. Then there were the women. I had plenty at my disposal. I was dishing out money and drinks right and left and naturally running down my savings. It was during this time that I met Doris and others. I was just carefree but rather unhappy at heart. Somehow I knew I was going downhill but I wasn't bothered. I even caught V.D. But instead of pulling the girl's ears I gave her money to go and see a doctor. (*Son of Woman*, 10-11)

As if catching the STD is not enough warning of the dangers of casual sex, Dod does not care about safer sex. He calls himself "an explorer interested in discovering darkest Africa" (12) and proudly declares himself to be "allergic to rubbers and I don't use them anyway. They make me droopy, that is what they do. I hate them" (13). Dod sees risk-

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on courtesy calls. The malady, which had an unusual affinity for wayward males, had no adverse effects on females at all. When the infected man went to pass water, he passed instead an endless nylon thread. And when a considerable length of the thread had been passed out, the victim's nuts suddenly shrivelled and the man died. There was no known cure or vaccine against the terrible epidemic" (230).

taking as part of performing his sexuality and even masculinity: he is not afraid to venture into dangerous sexual practices that expose him to STDs and he cannot stay celibate even for a short time. It is as if men in these novels cannot steer clear of sex. Dusman cannot follow Dr. Patel's warning to avoid sex when he gets infected: "No beer, no women and no hot pepper for a week," the doctor told him… "You should be well in seven to ten days" (122). However,

> Six weeks later, [Dusman] was visiting Dr. Patel [because] he had done everything the doctor had forbidden except eating hot pepper. He had been unable to resist Toto's beer offer and he had then met another street girl, paying her back in her own lousy Hong Kong currency…. And after the drink, he needed a woman just as bad. (122)

One notes here the constant reference to women as causes of infection for men. Noteworthy also is the connection made between alcohol, women and STDs. When men drink alcohol, it follows that they will have sex with prostitutes and in the process they get infected with STDs. It almost forms the equation STDs= beer/alcohol+prostitutes. The writers portray alcohol as one of the causes and effects of dysfunctional social and cultural conditions in the evolution of STDs and subsequently HIV/AIDS in Kenya.[16] Clearly men who get infected are carefree and take great risks with their lives. Meja

[16] My equation of alcohol, prostitutes and STDs should not be read to attribute too much significance to the role alcohol plays in promiscuity. There are men like Ndava and Diki in *No*! who soberly decide to have multiple sexual partners.

Mwangi writes that the 'Nylon Scare' plague[17] "had an affinity for wayward males" (230). Dr. Patel, a specialist on STDs, is highly reputed. His reputation, we read:

> … first and foremost … rests on his magic touch with the complaints of *wayward men*…. Most of his regular patients bought their troubles from the lodging upstairs. Dr Patel's was the nearest place they could find refuge and understanding after that. They rushed to him repentant and dying with shame. After a few days downstairs with him, they rushed straight back up to the *trouble merchants* for more. Then again they came back down embarrassed and confessed to Dr. Patel. Then back up again and again, in a seemingly endless cycle. Their frequency could be charted against whatever strain of virus was in fashion at the time, by whatever style of microbes was being volleyed to and from like tennis balls upstairs. Dr Patel was the best referee in town. He never admonished anyone or complained about their suicidal tendencies. It was *the sign of the times, the new way of a new people.* (*The Cockroach Dance*, 112; emphasis added)

Other than the reference to prostitutes as "trouble merchants" denoting them as carriers of problems and diseases, one notices here the connection between sex, prostitutes and STDs. Men cannot stay away from lodgings where prostitutes operate. This, the narrator claims, is a "sign of the times, the new way of a new people". My inference here is that prostitutes – and hence commercialised sex – and the rise of STDs are also seen as a consequence of a rapidly transforming society. Luise White (1990) discusses the history of prostitution in colonial Nairobi and shows how developments in communication and economic labour during the colonial period promoted demand for prostitution as sexual labour just like other forms of labour. The development of the colonial economy and its

[17] Note here also Mwangi's reference to 'the plague' a metaphor that he extends to his HIV/AIDS novel, *The Last Plague*.

labour demands had an effect on people's mobility where men and women moved into urban areas creating an environment in which prostitution developed. White observes that "prostitution is a capitalist social relationship not because capitalism causes prostitution by commoditizing sexual relations but because wage labor is a unique feature of capitalism: capitalism commodified labor" (11).[18] Prostitution and the rise of STDs therefore represent only one facet of multiple sites where modernity and a new moral economy are expressed. Due to modernity, a new kind of moral economy emerges that encompasses liberal morality as a new way of thinking about leisure activities; and this liberal sexual morality is further complicated by the consumption of alcohol. With the improvement in economic power and therefore the growth of a consumer society men's and women's pursuit and consumption of leisure and pleasure changes and prostitutes become sources of urban pleasure and therefore, a sign of "the new times". Bars and lodging houses form part of the sexual economy of modernity. The writers represent bars as breeding places for sexual immorality. In the novels, it is almost impossible for men and women to control their sexual urges after they take alcohol. Therefore, rapidly changing socio-political, economic and cultural boundaries transform how sexuality is treated and experienced, and more importantly, how sexuality is evolving in Kenya as elsewhere in the world.[19]

STDs are also seen as commonplace and therefore nothing to worry about. Men who get infected do not take their condition seriously enough to change their sexual behaviour.

[18] See also Wiseman Chijere Chirwa (1999) for a discussion of how economic, cultural, political and social factors influence the spread of STDs in Africa.

[19] See Dennis Altman (2001) for a discussion of modernity and globalisation and their effects on sex and sexuality in the world.

Even the doctors seem to enjoy treating such patients. Chuma says: "Already I had established regular visits to a certain Doctor Patel. Two weeks hardly passed without visiting the doctor to do something about a burning pain in my urethra. The doctor seemed to be happy about it" (79). Unlike Chuma who goes to the doctor when infected, his friend Kisinga is very casual about these infections that he and his friends have dubbed the "social disease":

> Kisinga took everything easy. If three weeks passed without catching the social disease, he would remark: 'Has this leak disappeared from the country?' Whenever he discovered that he was affected, he would grin and say: 'I am afraid of going to the toilets. I have caught a *simple cold*" (*Across the Bridge*, 79; emphasis added).

In another instance, Bethwell tells Lewis that getting an STD is "bad luck. If you end up uncertain of yourself, all you need is to go to a penicillin bar" (61). Men are embarrassed to go to the penicillin bar and they have devised a multitude of ways to conceal their identities while visiting the doctors. In *The Cockroach Dance*, Dusman says that men who visit Dr. Patel's clinic use "a whole spectrum of phoney camouflage names…. Customers [go] by non-existent identities and faces that say nothing" (116).[20] This is because they visit prostitutes so often – and consequently get infected as often and run back to the doctor– and therefore, "a single name would die of shame" (116). Dusman himself is known to the doctor as Steve, Felix, Anthony, Francis, Robert and Dan (117).

[20] Willie Wamae also says the following about penicillin bars: "In case you have never heard of a penicillin bar, this is a little place in town with a waiting room and a small bed-room. In the waiting room, there are a few magazines to read. The clients read these magazines avidly. They hide themselves with the magazines because nobody wants to recognize the other. If you look through the corner of the eye and find out that the bloke next to you is your boss at work, you quickly look the other way and cover yourself with that old women's fashion magazine that has only two pages left (*What a Life*! 152).

Getting an STD is seen by the men as shameful. Commenting on this feeling of shame by men who get STDs in Meja Mwangi's *The Cockroach Dance*, Lars Johansson writes, "The embarrassment is a reflection of the insight that their problems are caused by a violation of their reproductive power. To contract venereal diseases is a sign of failure and becomes a proof that they are powerless, exposed to destructive social forces" (83). Such a view explains why men blame prostitutes when they get infected. The prostitute is therefore represented as an emblem of contagious, shameful diseases that emasculate men (Ibid, 84). The fact that men can transmit and contract STDs through sex seems inconceivable to these men because they believe they have full control of their sexuality and that they have mastered women's bodies. As a result, accusing prostitutes of carrying and spreading STDs is, as Luise White (1990) claims, "a way for men to deny their own fragility and vulnerability to place themselves in a healthy opposition thereby creating the notion of the other" (178).[21]

I have noted that the language and imagery used in representing the prostitute in this fiction makes her undesirable. Shannon Bell (1994) notes that the body is contextualised and given meaning in discourse. She quotes Susan Rubin Suleiman who argues that "everything we know about the body … exists for us in some form of discourse and discourse, whether verbal or visual, fictive or historical, or speculative is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent" (2). In her own words, Bell says

[21] Blame is a very common issue in HIV/AIDS literature and as this thesis shows, blame leads to stigmatisation and discrimination which can prevent infected persons from seeking treatment. However, as I argue also, stigma and discrimination can be seen as social processes used to create boundaries between what is acceptable and unacceptable and hence regulate sexual behaviour in the time of epidemic.

that "the meanings of the body in discourse shape the materiality of the real body" (12).[22] In discourse, Bell claims, "modernity through the process of othering has produced 'the prostitute' as the other of the other: the other within the categorical other, woman" (2). O'Neill (1994) rightly claims that "discourses and representation of the prostitute or prostituted women help to sustain the ways in which meanings associated with the prostitute as "other" are maintained in public imagination" (136). These discourses, O'Neill insists, "are deeply embedded in the patriarchal imagination and are enacted through hegemonic heterosexuality" (136). As a marginalised socio-sexual identity, the prostitute is blamed by men for infecting them with diseases, thereby disavowing themselves of any feelings of guilt and shame for their sexual promiscuity and deviance. This is successfully done by depicting the prostitute's body as an emblem of dangerous sexuality that threatens "accepted/normal" sexuality within marriage. Furthermore, the prostitute's body is portrayed as a dirty and disease-ridden body and therefore, a carrier of pollution of various kinds.[23] The kind of disavowal that also leads to the creation of the woman as the other permits men to claim to know women's bodies and subsequently establish psychological and social control and power over women's bodies and their sexuality. However, from a psychological point of view, denial and blame can be seen as coping mechanisms since men realise that they are also at risk of infection with STDs.

[22] See Moira Gatens (1996: 31).

[23] See Luise White (1990: 6-10). It is noteworthy that With the advent of HIV/AIDS, the prostitute's body has moved from being seen as just a diseased body to a body representing destruction and death.

Other than blaming women for infecting men with diseases, Mwangi also depicts foreigners as bringing these diseases into the country.[24] This is what Dr. Patel tells Dusman during one of his regular visits:

> 'My friend, you have the Hong Kong flu,' Dr Patel said point blank. 'How the hell is that?' Dusman asked when no more information was forthcoming. 'I have never been to Hong Kong'. 'It is Hong Kong Terror. A breed between Chinese and European flu, a tough breed to destroy. There is a lot of it around these days…. This is more serious than the normal Nairobi trouble, or even the more common trichomoniasis. You understand, I have recently treated a lot of the Hong Kong strain…. It was introduced to this country by sailors and tourists'. He shook his head sadly. 'You know this country could be clean if only they would keep out the tourists and sailors. They bring us new strains years before the new drugs get here. Now the normal Nairobi flu, that's nothing…' (119)

Mwangi and the other writers look upon carriers of disease as an 'other' thereby stigmatising them. Although I argue that Mwangi perpetuates the stereotype of foreigners bringing diseases into the country, this representation can partly help in explaining the epidemiology of STDs.[25] As several scholars have noted, different socio-economic and political factors contribute to the spread of STDs. For example Milton Lewis and Scott Bamber (1991) show that the "economics and politics of colonization influenced… the spread of STDs" (2). They add that "economic modernization changed the forms of

[24] Various researchers have shown that during epidemics or times of major calamities, there is the tendency to blame others, and especially foreigners. See Renee Sabatier (1988) and Terence Ranger (1992) for example.

[25] The epidemiology of HIV/AIDS has also been explained in similar terms, especially in its early phases of spread. The association between travel and STDs has been known for centuries and it has become almost traditional to blame foreigners, usually sailors and truck drivers and migrant workers. The HIV virus was said to travel along communication routes like sea depots and truck drivers and sailors were thought to carry the virus from one place to another.

production and the social relations of the colonized people in ways favouring the spread of STDs. For example, it promoted unprecedented concentration of population in large port cities in which prostitution flourished, facilitating the exchange of STDs with the outside world" (2). Chijere Chirwa (1999) also notes that "the relationship between people's mobility and the spread of STDs [and] the socio-economic environment in which these diseases spread… were intrinsic parts of the capitalist system" (143). As a result, he concludes that "the spread of STDs… in Africa… should, therefore, be understood as a result of a combination of economic and social forces associated with the capitalist economy" (144). For instance one notes in this fiction that it is only men who seek treatment after infection with STDs. The writers do not say anything about the women, whether they choose not to get treated or whether they are unable to afford paying for the treatment.

From my discussion of the novels, I argue that there seems to be a similarity in the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS in Kenya. The three are linked to sex, sexuality, gender, socio-cultural and economic dynamics. This suggests that there are complex and multiple social and cultural problems caused by and accentuated by the processes of change in society. Sexuality and STDs do not occur in a vacuum because sex and sexuality are not just private matters. Instead, they are greatly influenced by a multiplicity of factors in society. (sexually transmitted) diseases should be understood within a framework of diverse social, cultural, economic and political conditions existing in a particular society. For this reason, there is need for an analysis of the specific socio-cultural, socio-sexual and

economic contexts within which risk factors, the creation of vulnerable groups and the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS occur.

CONCLUSION

HIV/AIDS comes at a time when there is a lot of anxiety surrounding sex and sexuality and therefore the need to regulate both. The concern over sexuality by various sections of society has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and has served to further agitate the tension between the dialectic of romance and regulation of sexuality. I have shown that popular fiction of the 1970s and 1980s narrates issues of sex, sexuality, romance, gender and disease among other issues. Sex is seen as pleasurable and as a way of consuming leisure. Romantic unions are formed without much thought being given by the parties involved and I have also argued that sex and romance are subsumed to mean love. Promiscuity and prostitution form the core of the discourses on romance and love in most of the fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. Romance and love are also shown to have negative consequences like unwanted pregnancies, broken marriages and relationships, infection with STDs and even suicide. Although these novels show that liberalised sex can be dangerous, it is not treated as something that needs urgent attention either by society or the characters involved. For instance, being infected with an STD is likened to getting a simple cold. On the whole, however, the discourse on romance within Kenyan society in the 1970s and 1980s suggests that Kenyan popular fiction was sensitive to the destructiveness of uncontrolled pleasure that men sought by having multiple sexual partners and by practicing promiscuity. These issues are given more urgency in the HIV/AIDS fiction. The writers of HIV/AIDS fiction show that uncontrolled and careless

sexual liaisons can have dire consequences. The writers also show the need to understand gender relations as a key factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Consequently, they suggest the need to revise culturally defined traditional notions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality.