

The East African Urban City Space as a Sight of Dislocation of Masculinities : A Study of Peter Kimani's *Before the Rooster Crows*

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the fluidity of masculinities in Post-colonial urban Kenya. The paper examines urban masculinity in Kenya through the experiences of the Muriuki, the protagonist in Peter Kimani's *Before the Rooster Crows*. Muriuki transits from the village to the City encountering experiences that baptizes him to a new form of masculinity in comparison to his rural masculinity. Carton (2001) and Everett, (2000) aver that urban masculinity compared with rural masculinity is not strictly governed by traditional norms. They argue that there are new urbanite youths who strive to create a new status of manhood and masculinity by defining themselves violently against their fathers and authority. There is an outright rejection of family and fathers. The paper seeks to examine Carton and Everett's assertion. The paper examines this new form of urban masculinity through the life of the main protagonist, Muriuki's life in the city. The paper contends that masculinity is not static but fluid.

Keywords: Urban Masculinity,,Emasculated, Hegemony, Subordinate

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Introduction

The setting of the novel gives a clear picture of the post-colonial Kenyan society. *Before the Rooster Crows* is set in the urban center. The novel implicitly explores how masculinity is negotiated in the city by the main protagonist, Muriuki. In this section, masculinity in urban Kenya is the metropolitan. Thus masculinity manifested there is a symbol of the superior west, while rural Kenya represents the inferior east. The rural areas represent a traditional form of masculinity. Muriuki opts to migrate from the rural, undeveloped world to the urban developed world. The city is his center, the face of western civilization and development. Indeed, it is Muriuki's dream to exit from rural poverty. Disillusionment with the rural life hastens his departure to the "place of his dreams":

His sense of anguish was worsened by the beckoning *Gichagi*¹ nightlife that he could ill-afford: the appetizing *mitura*² nestling on the sizzling brazier in butcheries, the baked cakes that snuggled on the shops' glass displays, the nicely wrapped lollipops. When he visited the shops on errands and watched other youths indulge in what to him was the ultimate indulgence, Muriuki cursed all the way. More curses were cast when he knocked his toes on the rock-out cropping that dotted the uneven *Gichagi* tracks. (Kimani, 2002: 10)

The post-colonial Kenyan society is already demarcated. The class divide between the few rich and the majority poor is very large. Poverty levels are highest in the rural areas. Hence, Muriuki's reason for migration cannot be criticised. Fanon (1986) explains that none of us is outside the psychic and social structures that define some human being as superior and others as inferior. He argues that as human beings, we are all embedded and formed within them. According to Fanon, stratification is found in all human societies though in varied forms, such as race, class or even gender.

Moreover, Muriuki's migration to the city is inevitable because he is the only man left in his family. Muriuki's mother is a widow and also a peasant farmer. The village does not seem to provide any means of feeding his expectant family:

Muriuki looked at the expectant faces of his sisters and brothers and felt weak at the mighty challenge before him. They looked up to him as their redeemer; as their guiding light. In a sense, he was their father too for their old man died long time ago. Muriuki was then a young boy, even too young to understand that his father had passed on. And when he became of age, he never asked his mother. He hadn't asked her yet. He had vague fears that that would be like opening an old wound. He felt in his heart a sincere desire to help his family. He would do everything possible and see to it that their life of misery would be improved. (Kimani, 2002: 4)

¹ *Gichagi* means "village" in the Kikuyu language.

² *Mitura* is a delicacy among the Kikuyu made from "cow intestines."

Muriuki's life epitomises that of the majority, Kenyan poor who inherited poverty caused by colonialism and poor governance after independence. When Muriuki migrates to the city, he encounters a new form of masculinity, one different from the one in the village. The young man is torn between two forces of masculinity, traditional masculinity and the new form of urban masculinity. The challenge is how he attempts to reconcile the two forms of masculinity.

Muriuki is also a victim of two very powerful forces: the traditional society, which expects him to perform his patriarchal duties without considering his current poverty (traditional masculinity), and the new forces (modernity) both internal and external that control the new independent country. Lindsay and Miescher (2003) commenting on the crisis of masculinity after the end of colonialism note that:

The decline of the nation-state and the end of colonialism also marks the concomitant historical crisis of the values it represented, chiefly masculine authority founded and embodied in patriarchal family, compulsory heterosexuality, and the exchange of women all articulated in the crucible of imperial masculinity. (28)

Men like Muriuki find themselves engulfed by the post-independence slump of the 1960s in many African countries. Men could no longer find work in the cities. Rather than stay jobless in the rural area, Muriuki still opts to search for a job in the hostile city:

He marveled at what he was seeing, and decided he was very lucky to be in the city. The core of sophistication. (sic)The source of all that is good and dignified ... He stood to admire the powerful engines that roared down the road, and instantly envied those behind the wheels. In his mind, he imagined how he would drive one such car one day. He would ride to Gichagi and hoot and wave to passers-by and give lifts to those he knew. He would drive his family. (Kimani, 2002: 19)

Young Muriuki is living in an illusion. He believes that the city unlike the village will give him riches. He is ever eager to restore his "manly" esteem back in the village. That is why he looks forward to confirming to the village he has made it. The quest for wealth is not only for Muriuki's own comfort, but a confirmation that he has passed the test of true "manhood". He is very optimistic:

But he need not worry, he consoled himself. As long as he tried hard enough, everything was possible and within reach. Doors would be opened if he knocked hard enough; prayers would be answered if he prayed earnestly. Then there was Mumbi waiting for him. He was glad to be in the city. (Kimani, 2002: 20)

Mumbi is Muriuki's childhood sweetheart who migrates to the city before he does. Just like Muriuki, the village poverty and disillusionment make her look for better fortunes in the city: "Mumbi had fled from the uncertain life much earlier. Her departure from Gichagi for the unknown was sudden; not even Muriuki her friend and confidant for many years got wind of it" (10). However, the unfortunate bit is that the migrants' fate (Muriuki and Mumbi) is beyond their control. There are other external forces that Muriuki and Mumbi cannot control despite their hard work and enthusiasm. Lindsay and Meischer (2003) describe these external forces that are quite predominant in the third world:

The challenges of development in the third world are vast and have become greater with globalization and the spread of free-Market ideology. The gap between the First and Third world is getting larger, but of equal concern is the growing stratification of the Third World populations as the poor get poorer and new middle class often associated with the apparatuses of state get richer. (99)

There are a lot of societal expectations that weigh down on Muriuki because of his male gender. These expectations emanate from the traditions in African set up. Silberschmidt (2001) notes that aspects of masculinity that have roots in the pre-colonial African are still valued in the post-colonial era (53). She lists some of the aspects of what a respectful and good man should do in traditional African cultures. The man should be able to take care of his family, educate his children, pay fees, marry many wives and get many children. Furthermore, he is supposed to assist the community (communalism). Take for instance the burden Muriuki shoulders to provide for his siblings and mother. There is immense pressure on him to fulfill these societal expectations. The young man is quite optimistic that the city can help him cement his "manhood" so as to take his "rightful respectable position in his village. Muriuki's return to the village is pegged on achieving these "unwritten" societal standards. However, striving to achieve these qualities of an ideal African man comes with a big price. Friedriken (2000) commentary best illustrates Muriuki's situation. Friedriken asserts that:

Traditional ordering of relations between genders and generations based on hierarchy and authority is now largely history, and more clearly so in towns than in the countryside. A moral ordering in this area survives, however, as societal memory as scattered practices, particularly important in relation to reproductive strategies, and most of all with poor urban youth, as an absence and a yearning. Poor families have less opportunities of substituting old orders with new ones because of situation of instability and lack of material and immaterial resources. (221)

Economic independence becomes Muriuki's first priority. He begins job hunting. This is after he is disappointed by Mumbi (his lover) who lives in the city. The young man begins to encounter the new urban masculinity that depends on survival, individualism and stoicism. Muriuki initially enters the city with anticipation that Mumbi is warmly waiting for him. His anxiety is evident in the vehicle. Muriuki still carries the traditional rural spirit of hospitality:

Muriuki squeezed into a seat, clutching his paper bag carefully. A rusty speaker coughed to life; and belted a song Muriuki could not quite place. "We are going ... Heaven knows, we are going ... we know we are! ... went the song, Muriuki liked the prophetic tone of the words. He was going, too, he told himself. Heaven knew he was in his way to see Mumbi! How delighted she would be, he mused. She would be pleasantly surprised. (Kimani, 2002: 21)

The song symbolises Muriuki's dreams and aspirations. He is travelling to achieve success and unite with his childhood sweetheart. The song gives him hope of divine intervention in his pursuit despite the challenging circumstances. The city is Muriuki's Canaan as he escapes from the village wilderness. Unfortunately, to Muriuki's rude shock, the city is filled with callous and inhuman individuals. Individualism is the order of the day. Muriuki is roughed up when he eats in a hotel and cannot pay. The young man falls short of money after he parts with some coins to assist a beggar. However, the explanation to the hotel owner is received with a lot of sarcasm. In the city, sympathy is not a common norm. Violence is meted on Muriuki ferociously:

"That bloke has eaten to his fill and now says he shouldn't pay because he gave his money to a beggar!" the cashier exclaimed.

"Is it true?" Simba hissed. By now, everyone was listening attentively to the unfolding saga. Even the draught players had stopped their game.

"What does he think this is?" one posed. "A home for the destitute?"

"or a church?" Another contributed ... Suggestions then poured in on what should be done to him.

"Strip him naked and keep his clothes" "Beat some sense into his head." "detain him for the night" "Let him bring his beggar friend and confirm his story." "Tickle his ribs till he vomits all the food." The last one elicited laughter as did the next one, "Make him peel a sack of potatoes, then let him feed on the peel." Suddenly, Simba grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and threw quick heavy punches to his belly, followed by a mighty kick that made him stagger through the doorway, knocking his head on the lower frame. A loud applause greeted his exit. (Kimani, 2002: 27)

The nuances of the dialogue by the men in the room depict a new type of city masculinity. Violence is cherished. The men have been hardened by a life of disillusionment because of urban poverty. Muriuki's entrance and situation is kind of catharsis for them. His constant ridiculing and embarrassment serves as an outlet for them to vent their own frustrations. Moreover, urban capitalism has exalted money above everything else. Materialism has seeped into the societal fabric and replaced traditional values of humanity like kindness or sympathy. Hence lack of money is a disaster as Muriuki finds out. It is also the study's contention that most of these men have also not lived up to the ideals of a "real man" and thus have low self esteem. They are emasculated men. Thus violence is the language they understand. It is the only way they can assert their masculinity. Society has rejected them as losers or "lesser men". The traditional norms of hospitality have disappeared. Violence is their relative response to the loss of power. Xaba cited in Morell (2001) tries to explain the new form of urban masculinity when commenting about masculinity and urban violence in South Africa's poor neighbourhoods (especially black neighbourhoods). He points out that during socialisation, young urban boys are initiated into gang cultures that stress on violent behaviour. Herald (1999) argues that manhood is synonymous with violence. However, this equation of masculinity with violence can be contested. Herald argues that such violence in Africa emerged from the traditional socialisation of warrior hood and the fear of being called a coward. Amin MaMa cited in Alexander and Mohanty (1997) opines that violence in the third world is a direct legacy of colonialism. However, as the thesis argues earlier, it is not only colonialism but also poor post-colonial leadership. This leads to disillusionment in the new political order. Colonialism has an influence, but it cannot be entirely blamed. After some time in the city, Muriuki later reflects on this new sense of urban masculinity "His brief experience in the city had taught him that Gichuka was a complicated place to live in and required shrewd minds to interpret every situation" (42). He is now aware that unlike in the village, city life needs a different kind of approach, a self interested individual masculinity.

Apart from the humiliation Muriuki receives from been beaten up by fellow men, he is also embarrassed when he finds Mumbi with another man. Muriuki shared a fire with the watchman while keeping watch of Mumbi's apartment overnight with the watchman waiting for the former's return but only to be disappointed. Mumbi comes late in the night with a man oblivious that her childhood sweetheart was waiting for her. This situation hurts Muriuki more than the physical violence meted on him. His virility is challenged. Sex is a powerful tool used by men to assert their sexuality. Thus the loss of a girlfriend to another man heralds

disempowerment and symbolic emasculation. Muriuki's childhood lover and soon to "be" wife has the temerity to move with another man:

The early morning light found two forlorn figures reclining over what a few hours earlier had been a blazing fire. Now the fire had gone out and replaced by cold ash. Muriuki had not uttered a word since Mumbi passed before his very eyes, bringing along with her a man. He just hid his head in shame and wept. After all he had gone through to be with her, this was a disappointing anti-climax. He had attempted, to storm Mumbi's house and flush her out and demand an explanation. But the askari had prevailed upon him. "Never jump into conclusions," he had warned him. "That woman might disown you, she could even call you a thief." Muriuki could not imagine Mumbi betraying him, but had he not witnessed it all? "And who to knows," the askari added. "Maybe that's the man who pays her rent. In any case, he could be a dangerous man. Could be carrying a knife or a gun." At the thought of more violence, Muriuki had cringed, crouched near the fire and sobbed silently. (Kimani, 2002: 31)

The thought of a man crying is not very common. It clearly depicts the type of pain Muriuki has gone through. Men in many societies are socialised at an early age to resist any element of showing weakness (Seidler, 1999). The reality of being emasculated by a fellow man is too much for him to cope with. Nevertheless, Muriuki moves on with stoic dignity:

Tears burnt in his eyes and he unsuccessfully tried to fight them back. A church bell tolled in the distance, as if to remind him that what he really needed was some prayers...He had a new resolve when he rose. He dusted his clothes and ruffled through his hair. He wet his fingers and wiped his eyes. Then he walked on...But there was no turning back. He had to move on. Mumbi had betrayed him and he had to forget her. He wanted to put the widest distance between himself and her. (Kimani, 2002: 32)

Silberschmidt (2001) posits that disempowered men in East Africa sometimes use multi-partnered or extra-marital sexual relations to boost their masculinity and low self-esteem (666). Muriuki's emasculation or frustration is further heightened by his low socio-economic status. Muriuki becomes aware that he cannot maintain Mumbi in the city when he is jobless. The watchman, who is quite a realist, candidly tells Muriuki that Mumbi's companion is economically better off than Muriuki. In a nutshell, in the struggle for Mumbi, it was inevitable that Muriuki was bound to lose. Muriuki is hurt because of having to be subordinate to a fellow man. Connell (1995) explains that the most ideal form of masculinity emphasised in most patriarchal societies is hegemonic. Hegemonic masculinity puts a lot of emphasis on dominance. Muriuki is forced to a subordinate type of masculinity that wounds his ego.

Muriuki later re-unites with Mumbi. This is a victory he has been longing for after watching Mumbi move away with another man. It is a moment of restoration to his bruised masculinity. Muriuki's pride and ego had never healed from that earlier embarrassment. This is quite evident in his high spirits after the re-union. "She reeled off with mirth and he joined in. When he fell asleep, Muriuki was still smiling, happy and at peace with the world" (92). However, the happiness is short-lived. Muriuki's lack of employment comes back to haunt him. Their future with Mumbi can only be guaranteed if there is financial security. This situation returns Muriuki to his earlier emasculated state. It makes him feel less of a man. He cannot take care of his woman. Mumbi opts to return back to her old profession, prostitution. The arrival of American soldiers at the coast turns out to be her best opportunity:

She did not answer but instead pushed the paper across to him. Muriuki glanced at the big bold letters that were in the front page of the National News. HERE AT LAST! It announced. Below the headlines was a picture of a giant ship with scores of men disembarking.... Muriuki looked up. He could not connect the news and Mumbi's passive mood. "What's all this?" Muriuki asked, openly confused. "This is our future" Mumbi muttered and Muriuki looked at her, dumbfounded. (Kimani, 2003: 93)

Muriuki's world seems to be crumbling again. His girlfriend has the temerity to celebrate her return to prostitution. Muriuki is unable to stop her because he is economically powerless. This bruises his ego further. The woman Muriuki loves has to succumb to immorality because he does not have a job. Mumbi pegs their future in sleeping with other men. This situation creates an anti-climax in the reunion:

"Don't you see it? We can make a fortune if I pull my last job," She said in a plain voice. For long time, Muriuki was silent. When he got the full meaning of her words, he buried his face in his hands and gently shook his head, unable to believe it. Unable to believe words from his love; the woman he considered his future, now she was contemplating returning to her old trade. He did not wish to open his eyes and see her face, so he just covered his face and kept quiet. He heard her speak...I won't do anything you don't approve of. I was just wondering, if I did it just this once and help alleviate my suffering in future, and boost the life of the man I love, then..." (Kimani, 2002: 94)

Mumbi's words though candid are quite painful to Muriuki. They completely dent his self-esteem and ego. He cannot man up to fight for his woman. Indirectly the blame shifts to him. Mumbi explains that she wants to slide back to prostitution to uplift the life of her man. The implication is quite clear that the man has failed to play his role. Muriuki's economic marginalisation is his Achilles heel. It is a situation that constantly comes back to haunt him. He is in a state of helplessness as he cannot fulfill his breadwinning role. However, the societal structure does not understand. The society (represented by Mumbi and Muriuki's family back home) expect Muriuki to play his traditional roles. His situation makes him have no control over Mumbi. Muriuki loses his power whereby he cannot make a decision for Mumbi. Silberschmidt argues that men's control over women is an important social index for their masculine reputation. Muriuki is now losing his woman to other strange men who have just entered the country with dollars. He has struggled to mend the relationship through many challenges but it still does not work. Muriuki's masculinity is further demeaned when he is forced to accompany Mumbi to meet her foreign client in Mombasa:

Like a small boy accompanying his mother to the market, he trudged along, following in her footsteps. He had suggested he be left behind, but she resisted. She said she needed him by her side. Again the magic in her melted his hesitations and he obliged. It's like he is under a spell. (Kimani, 2002:95)

The comparison to a small boy gives a detailed description of Muriuki's emasculated state. Muriuki is beside her lover but he is very insecure. Muriuki's fears come to pass when he is unable to prevent Mumbi's tragic death in the hands of her white client:

The bottle landed on Mumbi's head with a deafening sound splintering into hundreds of fragments. Hands shaking and trance –like, the man took a piece of the broken glass and mutilated the unconscious body further. Muriuki watched all this paralyzed with fear and disbelief. Was this a dream? He rubbed his eyes again, unbelieving. When the man was through with his ritual, he quickly slipped into his clothes ransacked the room. He looked under the mattress but found nothing, then rummaged through the drawers and frisked clothes...He paused to take a sweep round the room then moved towards the inter-connecting door. Muriuki froze; had the man seen him? He heard the lock turn, but it was locked. When a blue eye met his, peeping through the keyhole, he passed out (Kimani, 2002: 109)

Mumbi is killed when she demands money from her client who is hesitant to pay. Muriuki who had followed Mumbi is forced to watch this grotesque scene through a key hole. He is so shocked that he is unable to react. The death of his lover in the hands of another man shatters his masculinity further. His powerless state pricks his conscience. He has failed his protector role. Mumbi had earlier told Muriuki that the latter was his shield. The pangs of guilt coupled with jobless frustration increase the pent-up anger in the young man.

Muriuki's later revenge heralds another scenario. He symbolically re-asserts his lost masculinity. How does a man kill his woman in front of him? His conscience does not seem to settle until he reasserts his revenge. Muriuki's manhood has been wounded again. His helplessness exposed. This makes Muriuki have tormenting questions whether he was a real man. Tragedy further befalls him when he is accused of the murder of Mumbi and held in solitary confinement:

Unknown to him, he had been moved to Pwani Police Station where he was held in solitary confinement. He lay in the water-logged room wondering what was happening to him....why did the black – shoed men think he would have any reason to kill her? A girl who he loved and promised to love for as long as he lived? (Kimani, 2002: 114)

The author uses Muriuki's incarceration as a castigation of the Kenyan justice system. He is tortured and forced to confess a crime he never committed. Muriuki has already been pronounced guilty before any serious investigation. Muriuki is later freed and the white sailor arrested for Mumbi's murder. Despite being released, guilty Muriuki's conscience is not settled. Revenge is what is ringing in his mind:

By the time he neared the bathroom, he was shaking so terribly that he could barely compose himself. He was terrified at the prospect of meeting that giant of a man. As he went through those steps, a voice inside him asked some questions that made him calm a bit: *You watched your girl killed, witnessed the killer walk free, and all you can do now is shake with fear? What kind of man are you?*

The voice went on: *She cried out for you, but you were too afraid. She even called out your name, yet you turned your back on her. You just watched from a distance, from the safety of a locked door, and now you want to run away...What kind of man are you.* (Kimani, 2002: 142)

The trial of the white soldier called Desertstorm elicits a lot of emotions in this post colonial Kenya state. The presiding judge is a white judge called Harkmann. Racial tensions are still high in this new African independent state. The judiciary still has former colonial white officers as judges. This trial is taking place before the full transition to black power. Most of the black people had not yet obtained education, thus most judges were still white. In releasing Desertstorm, the judge is informed by an earlier incident during the colonial period

when the MauMau freedom fighters killed his mother: “the details were scanty; all the attackers said was that all white men must leave the land they were occupying. That Africa was for Africans” (132). Judge Harkman therefore releases the sailor with that revenge mission in his mind:

“The same principle will apply in Desertstorm’s case because it matches that was committed. *It matches the crime committed in my own backyard. A white woman killed by a black man or men. Now it’s a white man killing a black woman so we call this poetic justice?* (Kimani, 2002:134)

Judge Harkmann releases Desertstorm who is guilty because of the former’s past experience at the hands of the Mau Mau. The acquittal of Mumbi’s murderer emboldens Muriuki to avenge. The killer is left off the hook and charged a mere fine of ksh 500. Muriuki trails Desertstorm to his resort at the coast and confronts him. This is the moment of Muriuki’s redemption. He feels he needs to salvage his “wounded manhood”. The confrontation between the two men is very dramatic. The nuances of this confrontation reveal the clash of two antagonist masculinities, hegemonic (Desertstorm) and subordinate (Muriuki). There is a lot of suspense which heightens the tense mood:

But percolating just above the anger was the unspoken fear which was now dared him to defy it. What kind of man are you? In death, they have cheapened her life and degraded her memory. It is you who promised to love her forever?

The bathroom door burst open and Muriuki and Desertstorm met face to face. This time there was no keyhole. No door to separate them. They stared into each other’s face. Man to man. Eye to eye. The blue eye looked at the black eye. Blue eye remembered the black eye. Black eye remembered the blue eye. They exchanged hateful glares. Murderous stares. Muriuki stared back, and through his gaze, images of Mumbi’s last moments flashed before him. He could see her tossing in bed in pain as burns were administered on her body. He saw the monster lift the bottle, but rather than put guard on his head to avoid the fatal blow, Muriuki grabbed Desertstorm’s hand. (Kimani, 2002: 142)

Muriuki has imbibed the culture of the tough guy machismo from his interaction with the men in the city. Such a type of masculinity propagates that violence begets violence. This is not the same innocent Muriuki who had come from the village. Though Muriuki does not engage in gratuitous violence, he is forced by circumstances. Justice Harkman’s action of acquitting Desertstorm also impels Muriuki to commit the crime. It is also a case of poetic justice. Muriuki finally kills Desertstorm and is arrested “MAN KILLS TO REVENGE SLAIN LOVER, screamed the National news in its banner written in the papers.” (Kimani, 2002: 142). Muriuki is driven by paranoia of failure as a man, while Desertstorm is out to save his life. Muriuki’s actions are probably driven by depressive disorder. According to Dennis Balcom (1998), the condition occurs when a person’s actions are driven by strong emotions rather than reason. Muriuki is not a murderer but a tragic character.

Though Muriuki is arrested, Desertstorm’s death is a triumph that massages his wounded ego. It symbolically represents his reassertion of his masculinity. Unfortunately, the masculinity is reasserted through a vice. Emasculated men like Muriuki are sometimes forced to use vices to vent out their frustration on the patriarchal order that perpetuates dominance. Through Harkman’s judgment, the author also castigates the Kenyan justice system that is not fair especially to the downtrodden. Hence, it is my contention that Muriuki should not receive blatant condemnation for his actions. He is a product of a state that perpetuates class divide and a male constituency that propagates hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is an ideal form of masculinity that cannot be fully attained.

Conclusion

Kimani’s *Before the Rooster Crows*, ends up on a fatalistic note. Muriuki is unable to transit from rural masculinity to urban masculinity. The family visits Muriuki in prison, an action that reminds him of his unfulfilled patriarchal breadwinning role. This meeting is quite painful to Muriuki because it is a clear reminder of his failed masculinity. Providence to his family was Muriuki’s major objective of leaving the village. It was the ultimate test of his masculinity. Nonetheless, his tragic fall is caused by the hegemonic masculine expectations heaped on him by his family and the strong patriarchal society, despite his subordinate position. Moreover, there is a strong element of Christian morality and masculinity in the text. Just like the biblical Christ, Muriuki is a scapegoat sacrificed for the sins of his community. He strives to live a life governed by morals and old values of traditional masculinity. Nevertheless, the strong forces of the new urban masculinity and pressure from family members, girlfriend and society cause him to adopt a new hyper masculine nature. The title of the text *Before the Rooster Crows*, alludes to the betrayal of Jesus by Simon Peter. The presence of the family at the prison is a reminder to Muriuki, of his earlier unfulfilled promise. It is just like when the rooster crowed to remind Peter of his promise not to betray Christ. Thus the family’s presence at the prison is a reminder to Muriuki of his betrayal. Muriuki’s later knowledge about his late father, a leader of the Mau Mau and later national hero further gives him more traumas. Just as he failed to live up to his departed father’s role as

breadwinner for the family, so he is unable to fulfill the community and nation's expectation's that he be a heroic figure like his father. Hence he seems to fail masculine ideals at all levels.

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