

# Deconstructing Truth as a Symbolic Construct in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat*

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## Abstract

As a literary work which builds its plot on the intricacies of crime and murder, Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* has many of its criticisms focused on vices thus giving the text a meaning as expected, of a crime fiction. However, critical discourse has not been focused on deconstructing the symbolic idea of Truth in the text and its relevance in generating new and multiple meanings in the text. Therefore, through a close reading, this research aims to explicate the running idea of truth in the novel as a symbolic construct and traces the chains of multiple meaning it signifies. This is achieved through a focus on Paul Ricoeur's dialectical hermeneutics of faith and suspicion, which seeks to unearth hidden meanings from the primary symbol. To this end, the research focused on three objectives, first, it devotes itself to the identification of truth as a symbolic construct in the text; second, analyses the symbol of truth based on the hermeneutics of faith, which reveals truth to be that centred on the true reasons behind the death of Marcy Jane and other crimes in the text thus making it a quest for justice: while lastly, the symbol of truth is critiqued based on the hermeneutics of suspicion, which demystifies the hidden meaning of truth as truth for self-identification and truth about Africa which also serves as the supreme finding of the research.

**Keywords:** Truth, Symbol, Hermeneutics, Faith, Suspicion, Meaning, Mukoma.

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## INTRODUCTION

A symbol conventionally refers to that which represents more than one thing. In literary studies, the ability of a text to generate more than one meaning is noted as multiplicity of meaning and opts as a criterion for judging value in a literary work in modern literary criticism. As Hazard Adams explains, this is because 'the literary language thrives on ambiguity, overtones, and odd combinations of meaning' and this according to him are not mere references to 'simple tricks on syntax and pun but to a much broader conception of multi-meaning' (Abdul 2008, p. 801 – 816). Therefore, literary criticism hinged on the identification and explications of symbols contribute in achieving multiplicity of meaning as a symbol says more than is represented.

This ability of a symbol to generate surplus meaning is also identified in Paul Ricoeur's definition of a symbol, which explains it to be "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first" (Ricoeur 1974, p. 12). From the outset, this definition first connotes the symbol to be a kind of sign since it communicates meaning, but not in the sense of structuralism where a sign is equal to a signified, but in the post-structural sense where a sign relates to numerous chains of signified through a complex relation with other signifiers. (Ricoeur 1967) furthermore distinguishes the symbol from a sign as he explains that despite all symbols being a sign, "not every sign is a symbol" (p. 14). For, whereas a sign gives out only literal meaning, a symbol is laden with surplus meaning which are implicitly wrought behind the direct meaning and can only be understood through the former. Focusing on the multiplicity of meaning through symbolic constructs as supported by post-structuralism, *truth* in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* is analysed in this work as a symbolic construct capable of generating multiple meanings of the text but only through the apparent meaning as emphasized by Paul Ricoeur. This is achieved by applying Paul Ricoeur's dialectical hermeneutics of faith and suspicion as a means for the interpretation of symbols.

However, the adopted critical standpoint herein differs from frequent reactions towards the text, which most times establishes the work as a crime fiction by focusing on the intricacies of crime in the text. This position is taken by Wanjohi (2015) as he focuses on the theme of transnational violence and crime in *Nairobi Heat* and its sequel *Black Star Nairobi*. Through investigating the narrative techniques adopted in the text, he traces the progression of the crimes in the text from its local scene at Madison, USA to Nairobi in Kenya and then back to Madison. He likewise emphasizes that local or national crimes are current global phenomena that can translate

into transnational crimes thus the need for law enforcement agencies to combine efforts with the government to combat crimes and protect its citizens as witnessed in the text. Also, the structural standpoint of analysis adopted by Bie (2018) still gears towards the same course. Through the application of A.J Greimasactantial theory schema she identifies the different characters and their roles in the text as structural signs in the narrative which are geared toward obtaining the object of the text which is truth behind the murder and justice for the victims in the text. In the case of Coundouriotis (2017) however, a slight shift in view is noted as she not only confirms *Nairobi Heat* to be a crime fiction, but also analyses its contribution in the representation of the traumatic memory of the genocide. Through the non-popular theory of foregrounding and background, she postulates that the thrilling actions in the text acts as a “vanishing point” which takes the attention of the viewer away from the artistic depiction of sufferings connected to the genocide on the foreground to something more interesting.

It probably does not occur to many that Mukoma wa Ngugi’s *Nairobi Heat* can be read as more than just a crime fiction through interrogating truth, as used in the text as a symbolic construct. This would result to the exposition that *truth* as used in the text can mean the truth behind the murder of Macy Jane Admanzah, and also the truth behind Ishmael’s self-identity and knowledge about his place of descent which is Africa. Therefore, as might have been conjectured earlier, this study seeks to investigate these new set of meaning which is made visible only through the first meaning by identifying and interpreting truth as used in the text as a symbol as proposed by Paul Ricoeur’s definition of a symbol and his dialectical hermeneutics of faith and suspicion as an interpretive method of symbol.

### **Dialectical Hermeneutics of Faith and Suspicion**

The hermeneutic enterprise is one based on interpretation. Ricoeur (1974) defines hermeneutics as "the art of deciphering indirect meanings" (p. 13). Through this definition, an understanding of the pluralistic nature of the object of interpretation, which in this case is language, is noted and in extension, the post-structural idea that meaning in language is multiple and unstable for "no text means what it seems to say, or what its writer intended" comes to play (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 313).

However, Ricoeur places the root of hermeneutics in language on privileged words that are symbolic, thus Idhe in his introduction to *The Conflict of Interpretations Essays in Hermeneutics* explains that, "the location of the hermeneutic problem for Ricoeur takes its specific shape in words which have symbolic significance" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. xiv). This thus explains hermeneutics to be committed to the interpretation of symbols for "symbols occur when language produces signs of composite degree in which the meaning, not being satisfied with designating some one thing, designates another meaning only in and through the first intentionality" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 17).

Lodged therefore in the double intentional structure of a symbol is the inherent need to interpret these layers of meaning. According to Ricoeur (1970), interpretation becomes necessary when symbols are involved, and the method of interpretation is one wedge against two opposite polarities; a hermeneutics of faith and hermeneutics of suspicion thus creating a conflict in interpretation but both necessary in uncovering the multiple meaning of a symbol.

The hermeneutic of faith or restoration of meaning is characterized by a willingness to listen and believe in the intentionality of the symbol. This thus means to have faith in the symbol by describing it and not reducing it and Ricoeur (1970) explains that:

one reduces through explaining it through causes (psychological, social etc.). through genesis (individual, history, etc), through function (affective, ideological, etc) (but) one describes by disengaging the (noetic) intention with its (noematic) correlate - the something intended, the implicit object in ritual myth and believe. (pp. 29-30)

This thus posits that this interpretive method believes the symbol to be a revelation of a primary message and tends to understand it denotatively. Ricoeur (1970) gives an example with the symbolism of the pure and impure as he explains that the task in relation to the hermeneutics of faith is to "understand what is signified" (p. 30). Josselson simply explains the task of this interpretive method to be the art of "decoding the meanings with a little distortion as possible" (2004, p. 9).

On the other hand, a hermeneutic of suspicion tend to see the primary meaning of a symbol as a disguise and distortion of a hidden meaning. It therefore treats the primary meaning with suspicion and moves on to demystify it for a hidden meaning. Ricoeur points that this method stems from the art of the three "masters of suspicion" Freud, Nietzsche and Marx and focusing on Freud, he shows how he interprets dreams to be a false consciousness as it only masks the true meanings which resides in the unconscious and are mostly suppressed instincts and desires. This method of interpretation therefore leads to the unmasking of the suppressed desires, instincts and generally hidden meanings that the primary meaning tucks away.

Since these interpretive methods are opposed to each other and none being more privilege than the other is, Paul Ricoeur suggests a dialectic of both methods of interpreting symbols. Thus, he explains, "symbols are both disguise and reveal. While they conceal the aims of our instincts, they disclose the process of self-consciousness.

Disguise, reveal; conceal, show; these two functions are no longer external to one another; they express two sides of a single symbolic function" (Ricoeur, 1970, p.497). Thus, to coexist, these polarities exist in as complimentary dialogue where the literal meaning leads to hidden meanings and the hidden meaning is regarded as the "reduction of the illusions" of the first meaning or consciousness (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 27). Paul Ricoeur further explains that "What is definitely denied is not consciousness but its pretension to know itself completely from the beginning, its narcissism . . . it is this dialectical relation between the unconscious and consciousness which governs the articulation of a relation between the two hermeneutics" (1974, p.324).

### **Identifying Truth as a Symbolic Construct in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat***

One characteristic of a true literary work is that it calls for thinking even if it has a decidable meaning and a response to this call comes in different forms of which the hermeneutic art is one (Akwanya, 2018, pp. 132-137). The end to the hermeneutic function for Paul Ricoeur is the interpretation of the different levels of meaning in a text, implied only through the literal meaning by focusing on the interpretation of symbols. The symbol therefore, becomes an essential part in gaining understanding of a literary work, for by means of the symbol, "poetry has aspects whereby it speaks to thinking as such with the possibility of the disclosure of being, or truth, or meaning" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 28). An attempt to identify truth as a symbol in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* thus opens up thought patterns with possibilities of the disclosure of multiple significance of truth. Also, through a focus on the dialectical hermeneutics of faith and suspicion, indirect meanings are demystified through the first manifestation of meaning and the demystified meanings are regarded as the reduction of the illusions of the first meaning.

Having established that a symbol calls for thought, Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* opens up with Ishmael Fofona, an African American detective being submerged in the thought of the truth behind the murder of the beautiful blonde found on the porch of Joshua Hakizimana, an African professor of genocide in the US and a notable African hero during the Rwandan genocide. This begins to set the tone of the text to be a crime fiction thus, the search for the truth behind the murder of the girl is presented as the major reason Ishmael leaves the US to Nairobi as he sets to investigate the past of the prime suspect, Joshua Hakizimana.

However, the question on the murder of the blonde girl is not the only question that calls for thought on truth in the text. In the course of searching for the truth behind the murder of the blond girl, the protagonist of the text, Ishmael Fofona, is also plagued with questions and thoughts concerning the truth relating to his identity as an African-American and about Africa, "the land of his ancestors" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 1). This points at the ability of the symbol to lead to other meaning through the primary meaning thus the surplus and symbolic nature of truth in text.

The questions and thoughts of Ishmael concerning his true identity springs up from the basis of being an African-American but not truly belonging to and being accepted by any of the races. As an African-American detective, Ishmael faces the dilemma of choosing whom to pay allegiance to between a white and black dichotomy and he notes that the racial divide affects cases as in the case of the blonde girl, for "there would always be the facts of the case and the politics of the case" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 10). He points out that, the whites, out of racist mentality show scepticism in Jackson Jordan being the chief police in a white society and he (Ishmael) being solely in charge of a "black-on-white" crime as they are both blacks and that the state would not rest until the black criminals are caught (p. 4). Thus, the pressure the whites mount on the Police Force of Maple Bluff is not born out of their need for justice but of racial prejudice and thus communicates the idea of excommunication to the blacks. On the other hand, the blacks feel subjugated by the white justice system and extend their hate to blacks who work for the system by regarding them as traitors and not belonging to the black race. On this level, Ishmael suffers this hate and sense of excommunication from Mo and his ex-wife. He explains, "Mo was beautiful and she knew it. She would never date me for the same reason my wife had left me- I was a black cop and I sometimes arrested black people: I was a traitor to my race" ( p. 13).

In addition, Ishmael suffers the identity of a rebel for personally not conforming to the idea of being a black according to the terms of his parents. An attempt to explain to O why he had become a cop lets the reader into the complexities surrounding the reason as he thinks about it:

Why I had become a cop? I have talked about it often enough to have a prepared answer- wanting to do some good- but the actual reasons were complex. I didn't join the force because it was the only way out of poverty. I was a rebel... I had gone to college, graduated with a useless degree that could only have turned into a living by getting my PhD and becoming a professor. But the boredom! I did not want to become a drone, reciting the same lectures from ten years earlier about the constitution- although that's exactly what my parents wanted for me. I didn't want to become part of the black middle class with aspirations of whiteness, so I had opted out and became a cop. My ex-wife may have thought I was a traitor to my race, but to my mind, I was more myself than I would ever have been being black on someone else's terms. (Ngugi, 2010, p. 32)

Ishmael's choice of profession therefore does not stem from a place of passion for justice and thus poses a

suspicious glance on his confession of "allegiance to the dead girl" (p. 15) thus showing it as a disguise. Instead, it emanates from seeking a place of belonging where he can be his authentic self. However, his choice to become a cop does not give him a place between the racial divide and thus a continuous doubt of his identity. He is continuously irritated when referred to as *mzungu*, meaning white man on arrival in Nairobi and still does not feel at home amongst the blacks both in Nairobi and in America. Unlike O who has a clear idea of his identity, he is unable to answer directly what it feels to be black in America when asked by O, instead, he answers, "I can't say I know. When I am by myself, I don't feel black. I mean, how do you define yourself? What would you say you are?" (p. 52). In addition, when asked what it feels to be black being in Kenya, he answers, "How I feel? I want to find my killer and bring him to justice ... that's all" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 52). Thus, Ishmael's question of his identity is rightly described by Muddy who explains it with an excerpt of Derek Walcott's poem thus, "I am poisoned with the blood of both, where shall I turn divided to the vein? (61). Also, it echoes the existential tone of the character of the houseboy, Toundi in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*, when he asks, typical he and asks, "Brother, what are we, what are we black men who are called French?" (Oyono, 1991, p. 7). As typical of characters plagued with colonial influence and issues of displacement both physically and mentally, they are plagued with thoughts on the *truth* of their identity.

Also, thoughts and questions on truth about Africa begins to plague Ishmael as the case of the murder of the blonde girl points towards Africa and this counts as another symbolic value of truth in the text. Ishmael acknowledges knowing of Africa only from a generalized and biased viewpoint people living outside of Africa do have. He therefore takes the standpoint without much thought and it negatively affects his need to be associated to the place even after claiming it to be the land of his ancestors. He says:

Yes, I knew of Africa. After all, it was the land of my ancestors; a place I vaguely longed for without really wanting to belong to it. I might as well say it here: coming from the US, there was a part of me that has come to belief that it is a land of wars, hunger and disease and dirt even as my skin pulled me towards it... (Ngugi, 2010, p.1)

His thoughts therefore not only captures his biased view of Africa but also a view, which does not emanate from a place of personal knowledge or conviction but of generalized believe hence a question mark on what an unbiased and truthful report of personal conviction would be.

Although the thought and question of what is true pertaining the death of the blond girl found on the porch of Joshua Hakizimana starts and appears to be the focus of the text and gives it a meaning of a search for the discovery of truth in relation to the murder case as expected of a crime fiction, this question of truth also dissipates from the first, into the discovery of truth of self-identity and knowledge of Africa thus revealing the possibility of hidden meanings. Through this, *truth* in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* can be identified as a symbol in the sense of the Paul Ricoeur who points out that:

The symbol is constituted from a semantic perspective such that it provides meaning by means of a meaning. In it, a primary, literal, wordly, often physical meaning refers back to a figurative, spiritual, often existential, ontological meaning, which is in no way given outside the indirect designation. (1974, p. 12)

However, not only in the idea of Paul Ricoeur can *truth* as found in the text be identified as a symbol. Northrop Frye and Cleanth Brooks respectively identify a symbol as a "word, phrase or an image used with special reference and are distinguishable elements for critical analysis" and the "central, connecting idea in a poem which may even provide the building blocks in a literary work which we must understand if we are to understand either the detailed passage or the play as a whole" (as cited in Akwanya, 2018, p. 144). In Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat*, *truth* even with its surplus nature can be identified as a distinguishable element for critical analysis and also the building block necessary for understanding the literary text as it acts as the conflict that drives the plot of the text. This is seen in the text as the words of the anonymous caller who says to Ishmael, "if you want the truth, you must go to its source. The truth is in the past. Come to Nairobi" (Ngugi, 2010, p.18) motivates Ishmael's journey to Africa in search for the truth, thus the conflict and drive for the entire plot of the text.

However, focusing on Ricoeur's form of identification of a symbol, these meanings are gotten by interpreting the symbol through a dialectical hermeneutics of faith and suspicion where, through the first and intentional meaning revealed and accepted as a message by faith other meanings are gotten by doubting and viewing the same message as a disguise in relation to the hermeneutics of suspicion.

### **Manifestation of the Intentional Meaning of *Truth* through Hermeneutics of Faith**

Hermeneutics of faith regards the symbol as a message and Josselson adds that, "it is characterized by a willingness to listen, to absorb as much as possible the message in its given form and it respects the symbol, understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation"(2004, p. 5). Thus, the given form of the message passed through the symbol of truth in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* stems from the obvious question of truth presented in the text, which is the question of the truth behind the death of the

blond girl. As typical of a crime fiction, this question of truth relates the intentional meaning of the text to be the search for truth connected to a crime in order to effect justice. An interpretation of the symbol based on the hermeneutic of faith thus believes the protagonist, Ishmael Fofona without doubt when he says the only reason he is travelling to Africa is to investigate the past of his prime suspect, Joshua Hakizimana and to find the killer of the dead girl and bring him to justice (p. 52). Faith in Ishmael's stated intention or message thus leads to the revelation of the meaning of truth in connection to the findings he makes concerning the murder. Thus, the truth in relation to the murder confirms the African professor, Joshua Hakizimana as the killer of the blond girl finally identified as Macy Jane Admanzah. Joshua has earlier been celebrated as a hero for his selfless service during the Rwandan genocide. A headline reads that:

He had turned his deserted school into a safe haven during the Rwandan genocide. Revered by the genocidaires who were his former students, he had persuaded them to leave him and his school alone as an island of sanity in a sea of blood ... he gave sanctuary to thousands, many of whom he managed to smuggle over the border one way or another. But at the height of the genocide his former students surrounded the school and told him, 'No more in; No more out' and after this those who tried to make it in were massacred. (p. 11)

His acclaimed selfless act earns him the title of "black Schindler" and he also becomes the face of the Never Again Foundation, an NGO which calls for charity donations to cater for the Refugee Centers at Nairobi. His status as a hero thus does not justify his association to the death of the young blond girl found on his porch, especially as he provides alibies to confirm where he was at the time of death.

However, in Africa Ishmael uncovers the truth that Joshua is a principal killer during the genocide instead of a saviour. Mary Karuhimbi, a survivor of the genocide and currently the managing director of Kokomat Supermarket, testifies that Joshua had offered them refuge but brought them out only to be killed by his so-called students. She explains thus, "He uses honey to trap the ants ... the school was the honey and we were the ants" (p. 79). Joshua then understood that "he had saved a few in order to use them as baits and reel in whole villages seeking for refuge" (p. 79). Ishmael also discovers from Abul Jamal, a co-director of the Never Again Foundation alongside Samuel Alexander, a white and Joshua that, that, which posed a charity organisation to cater for the refugees of the war, was only a fraudulent set-up that collects money from guilt-tripped organisations who were silent during the genocide. It serves as an avenue for tax evasion, publicity and means of amounting wealth for board members of these organisations and the foundation as certain percentage are paid back to their private accounts. In addition, it achieves the aim of bribing survivors such as Mary Karuhimbi and other directors of Kokomat Supermarket into silence.

In connection to the murder of Macy Jane, Ishmael discovers that Macy was the only survivor of the Admanzahs, an American family who had relocated as missionaries to Rwanda before the genocide. During the genocide, the Admanzahs had been running an underground railroad out of Rwanda thus thwarting the plans of Joshua and other genocidaires. "They found out and massacred the whole family. Macy Jane survived by pure luck-she was away in boarding school at the time ... she never forgot what Joshua had done and she had gone back to the US to get justice in one way or the other" (p. 95). Joshua later confesses to having killed the girl. He says:

She come to me, so I use the opportunity for myself and kill her ... she want to seduce me and give me heroin ... she look for justice for herself but she didn't know I know about her ... foundation want her gone, I want her dead too, but Samuel and foundation think they get rid of me by killing the girl and plant evidence to say it was I. so I kill her first. (Ngugi, 2010, p. 171)

However, Joshua briefly escapes punishment by the law for his major crimes due to lack of concrete evidence. He tells the partial truth that the foundation had killed Macy to completely clear their tracks and had also planted her body on his porch in order to expose his past and bring him down as he was beginning to cost the foundation a lot to maintain. He confesses only to have tampered with evidence by removing the African jewellery on her to avoid connection to his past in Africa thus his being tried only for that charge. His testimony concerning the death of Macy Jane matches that of Andrew Chocbanc, another director of the Foundation who accosted Ishmael in the US, for before Ishmael kills him he confesses of killing Macy Jane. Ishmael later understands that he had sacrificed himself in an attempt to restore system of the foundation through Joshua.

Being driven by the major intention of gaining justice for the dead girl, Joshua's confession after he has fooled the world and escaped punishment by law leaves Ishmael with no choice than to adopt O's philosophy of justice we see now. He achieves his aim by aligning with James Wellstone, the leader of KKK, a notorious racist gang, to kill Joshua as he prepares to leave for Africa. James follows with the plan leaving Joshua close to dead, but Ishmael comes in and completely kills both James and Joshua thus solving too societal nuisance at once. To exonerate himself, Ishmael explains to the police chief "the KKK leader had killed Joshua the vindicated hero, and I had shot him and racial politics made it such that no one would ask questions" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 177)

### **Demystification of the Intentional Meaning of Truth as Truth of Self-identity through the Hermeneutics of suspicion**

Josselson (2004) explains, "Interpretation is not limited to direct, expressed, explicit meanings but may consider implicit meanings that lie beneath or within the structure of the language used to depict experience" (p. 8). Thus, Josselson gives voice to Paul Ricoeur's idea that "this hermeneutics (of suspicion) is not an explication of the object, but a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduced disguises" (p. 30). Thus, tearing off the mask, opens up new and hidden meanings.

The statement by the anonymous caller to find the truth in the source and by O to go back to the beginning when in doubt gains a new meaning as Ishmael indeed clears his doubts and understands the truth about his identity in Africa. This is noted in the shift from his indifference and constant feeling of not belonging to both the black and white race to a need to want to belong and a subsequent feeling at ease with the black race. The feeling of not belonging is noted as he arrives in Africa as he explains thus, "Blackness suddenly surrounded me, and coming from plane full of whites I felt relief and panic at the same time" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 2). However, at an African bar on the same day, Ishmael confesses to an awakening of something inside of him as the guitarist before his performance looked straight at him and said "this, for my black brother" (p. 19). At the end of the performance, Ishmael confesses, "I had been to a place within myself that I didn't know existed, a place that was beautiful and terrifying. The music had briefly awoken something in me - a rage or a healing" (p. 20). Ishmael's encounter of awakening thus notes the beginning of the confrontation of his identity crisis. The likening of the encounter to a journey, likewise the obvious journey of Ishmael into the heat of Nairobi or "Nairobi" as O calls it due to the height of crimes in the city echoes the symbolic journey of Marlow into "a place of darkness" (Conrad, 2017, p. 10) in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Zahra into the "forbidden greeny jungle" in Nnedi Okorafor's *Zahara the Wind Seeker* (Onunkwo, 2019, p.19). In all text, each journey had a symbolic undertone of the search for self through the confrontation of the origin of consciousness, which is the Id according to Freudian terminology or the unconscious according to Jungian (Onunkwo, 2019, p. 19).

In the course of searching for the claimed truth behind the murder in the text, Ishmael begins to have better affiliations to the black race thus a show of acceptance. This begins with being referred to as "black brother" by the guitarist unlike his being rejected of brotherhood by Joshua Hakizimana when he tries to claim it by telling him, "you're a nigger here, like me or the guy they shot 41 times in New York" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 17). However, Joshua does not agree in their brotherhood as he replies, "you say me and you niggers but you don't know what you say. You want African and want to be nigger? You desire brotherhood of pain?" (p. 17). He eventually shares in this "pain" in Nairobi as he uncovers the details behind the genocide and relates with survivors and victims of the genocide such as Muddy, Janet and Mary Karuhimbi. His acceptance is further capped in his personal relationship with Muddy who accepted him unlike Mo and his ex-wife who saw him as a traitor to his race and rejected personal relationship him.

Ishmael's need to belong and search of where to belong is ultimately solved as he finally identifies with the black and abandons his job as chief detective to start a new life in Africa. After his return from Nairobi to America, he regards himself as the case in need of solving and uncovers his need to belong to an intense place and to "live at one hundred degrees centigrade-all or nothing all the time-and maybe do some good while at it" (p. 180). However, the music performance where he feels this way "had ended and whatever had stirred- a feeling of voices whose register was an intense thirst for life- had died away" (p. 180). Ishmael's need is one that resonates from a confrontation and reconciliation of self, having faced the origin of his crisis symbolised in his journey to Africa, a place he had "vaguely for without really wanting to belong to it" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 1). His choice to move to Africa therefore a move from living as a reaction to the ideas of others to a more authentic self, such as in the manner of the character of Nora in Henrik Ibsen, *The Doll's House*. Guided by the feeling of where he is accepted, where he accepts and where he can truly live his terms, he arrives at the truth of his identity as he states:

In Africa I could live out my contradictions, or at least my contradictions would be reconciled by the extremes of life there ... I could belong anywhere. I would choose Africa. There I hated and loved like nowhere else. There was Muddy and O. There was Janet. There were things to do there. I wasn't superfluous. I was useful and needed. What more could I have wished for. (Ngugi, 2010, p. 180)

### **Demystified Truth about Africa**

Ishmael's journey to Africa also opens up to him a better and more truthful knowledge of Africa. Thus, the journey also becomes for him an avenue for a change of perspective of Africa, as he shifts from having the stereotypic believe of Africa being "a land of wars, hunger and disease and dirt" (Ngugi, 2010, p. 1) to a more truthful account built on the personal conviction of an authentic self.

During his growing affiliation towards the black race, the awakening he feels at the African bar which had triggered either "a healing or a rage" manifests more as a rage as he confesses to feeling in depth hatred for Lord Thompson, a previous British slave owner for living the stereotypic lie of the African life in his mansion.

Ishmael describes that his bedroom turned slave quarters reeked of "human decay: of unwashed feet, rotting teeth and death" (p. 35); and this to lord Thompson makes him African for he says to O and Ishmael, "look around you. Whatever I am, I am African my DNA is from my white parents, my skin is white, but my soul is African. . . ." (p. 37). Thompson's stereotypic believe of Africa and its people echoes Ishmael's believe before his arrival in Nairobi, but having experienced an awakening to belong he reacts with rage to the same kind of conviction he once had, thus a confrontation of his stereotypic belief of Africa. He shows this as he says:

I wanted to hit him so bad, break a bone or two and force him to see the world he had created around him for what it really was- a lie. Perhaps it wasn't all about him? Perhaps it was about my relationship to white folks back in the US, but whatever it was, it was powerful. And to claim he was African? What the fuck was that all about? (Ngugi, 2010, p. 38)

The confrontation of his previous knowledge about Africa thus leads to the birth of a new insight of the place and having been to Africa and gained a true self-identity, his response to the Chief when he asks, "How was Africa? How was it for you? Was no longer an evasive answer of his need to find the killer of the dead girl as he had earlier told O or a stereotypic view of Africa, but one of truth born out of personal conviction. He therefore answers the Chief's question saying, "Africa is the people ... but you gotta go see the people for yourself ... sit down, talk, eat, fight and love with them" (p. 178). He also acknowledges the extremity of the place but also its beauty just like anywhere else as he tells the Chief, "Africa is just Africa ... just as the US is the US. I could have died here but then I could have died here. I found love there, I think. But I had it here once" (p.178). He however envisaged this earlier for as he leaves the African bar he thinks, I'm about to enter Africa's underbelly. If "lucky, I would see some beauty as well" (p.20).

In addition, his new insight also changes his former perspective of not having any reason to be in Africa and not wanting to belong to it as he realises he could freely "live out his contradictions in Africa," and feel both "useful" and "needed" (p.180). Thus, he chooses to relocate to Africa which now is to him there he had "hated and loved like nowhere else" (p. 180).

A dialectics of the two polarities of interpretation thus emphasizes on their interconnectedness or unity in the symbol and suggests a dialogue between both in the sense that the literal leads to the hidden meaning but the hidden meaning is the origin or reduction of the illusion of consciousness presented in the literal meaning.

Therefore, the interpretations of the symbol of *truth* in Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* through the hermeneutics of faith reveals that Ishmael travels to Africa to uncover the truth that Joshua Hakizimana is not a hero as thought and presented by the Never Again Foundation, that he kills Macy Jane Admanzah to cover his past and Ishmael subsequently achieves his stated need for justice by killing him. Through a hermeneutic of suspicion on the other hand, the meaning of truth is in relation to the realisation of the truth of self-identity and knowledge about Africa. Ishmael discovers his true side on the racial divide as he eventually chooses to belong to Africa where he is accepted and he also develops a change of perspective of his stereotypic view of Africa to a more truthful knowledge built on the personal conviction of an authentic self.

In addition, a more complementary position of the two styles of interpretation is noted in the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. Consciousness, which is the manifested or literal meaning, is the "place where the two interpretations of the symbol come together but it is not the first reality which we can know but the last ... and the principal motive of demystification by the hermeneutics of suspicion is the desire to contest the privileged status of consciousness" (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 323). Therefore, Ishmael's unconscious question about the truth of his identity and thoughts about Africa is regarded as the core truth he searches for in Africa, the source, while his stated need to find the killer of the dead girl and bring him to justice is a disguise he puts up thus making it an illusion.

## Conclusion

Through the symbolic construct of truth and an interpretation based on the dialectics of the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion, Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* opens up to multiple significance. Therefore, as Paul Ricoeur demonstrates that through the hermeneutical dialectics of faith and suspicion, Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex* gains multiple significance as "a drama of incest and parricide which points at the instinctive problem of sex and a drama of self-deception which elucidates the tragedy of truth" (1970 as cited in Joselsson, 2004, p. 21); Ngugi's *Nairobi Heat* also gains significance as a text of search for truth behind crime and need for justice as expected of a crime fiction and a text with a quest for knowledge of identity and a place. The later meanings also "reduces the status of consciousness and displace the source of meaning" thus validating the connection of the dialectics of the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion to the theory of post structuralism (Ricoeur, 1974, p.330).

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