

Abstract

This article articulates novelists' constructions of prostitutes' humanity in the city's complex spaces that are both enabling and problematic. Through a reading of selected novels in tandem with Kenyan social histories, the article underpins why the city developed into a refuge for prostitutes and other urban outcasts but also shows how the allures of the city metamorphose into mirages for the ostracised. Glimpses into represented young women's choices of prostitution reveal their determined confrontations of powerful cultural constrictions to their humanity in rural spaces. The cultural constrictions sanctioned by patriarchal practices in the familial spaces manifest through incestuous rape, domestic violence, stigmatisation of barrenness and premarital pregnancy. Yet, having fled from the patriarchal countryside and chosen prostitution for survival or as an attempt to exercise their liberties, the prostitutes in Nairobi encounter unspeakable hostilities precipitated by a callous capitalist culture in the city too.