Some Trends in Kenyan Women's Novel of the 21st Century

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Introduction

Kenyan women's writing, which has become an established stratum of Kenyan literature since 1960s (and which I would loosely define as "literature by women, about women and for women") has in the current century received a new impetus from the generation of writers that have entered the Kenyan literary arena within three recent decades. It must be noted from the onset, that Kenyan women's literature is created in the two official languages of the country – English and Swahili. Currently, however, the English part appears to be more representative, especially in the field of novel writing [1]. Women authors of Swahili expression have mostly preferred smaller prosaic forms, such as short story and novella. Therefore, this paper will be focusing on the current state of English-language part in Kenyan women's writing, since it has featured a higher diversity of generic forms and topics.

With all this diversity, Kenyan women's literature seems to develop its major theme, established already during the first decades of its existence – women's empowerment and gender parity. Marie Krüger, in her study that analyses texts by Kenyan women writers written in 1990s, states that in modern Kenyan women's novel "female portraiture … transcends a one-dimensional representation and instead delineates female figures as dynamic and complex characters. Often they are moved to the narrative centre and become the central protagonists… [Kenyan women narratives] redefine and discuss the familiar stereotypes of "idealized mother" versus "corrupt whore" in different narrative contexts […] Although social expectations seem to define them exclusively as "wives", "mothers" and "widows", women appear in a variety of social and political roles… This critique of established gender roles motivates the women's endeavour to transgress and expand their possibilities, so as to accommodate role expectations to their individual desires and needs… The critique of established gender roles, the reconceptualization of binary oppositions, and the intertwining of private and public lives within a multilayered and complex fictional reality, are recurrent features that define female characterization in the novels and short stories" (Krüger 1998:59-61).

In the text below, I will try to show how Kenyan women writers of the new generation, which emerged in the current century, following the tracks of their predecessors, try to thwart the ossified gender roles and gender stereotypes by depicting in their works various problems modern Kenyan women are faced with, typical social situations manifesting these problems, share with their readers their recipes of how these problems could be dealt with, and create role-model characters for further inspirations of their reading public (which, I assume, is predominantly

female). These writers have drastically transformed the very image of woman in Kenyan literature, changing it from a downtrodden of the society to the image of a socially empowered and committed woman, competing with the "stronger sex" in various fields – from business to politics. The texts analysed are grouped into several categories, or trends, each dealing with a specific thematic concern or addressing a specific audience.

Social-critical novel: women and the city

In the year 1998, J. Roger Kurtz in his seminal study *Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: the Post-Colonial Kenyan Novel,* acknowledged that "the development of a significant tradition of writing by women is one of the most important recent developments in Kenya's literary history" (Kurtz 1996: 154). And throughout the chapter dealing with women's literature, the scholar was deliberately stressing the inseparable connection between the concept of female emancipation and the urban lifestyle. "[Kenyan novels] suggest that the city, because it disrupts traditional social patterns, and despite its customary nature as a male environment, can be a place where women are able to create some measure of personal emancipation. Women can free themselves from dependence on fathers, husbands, or other men—particularly if they can find employment. The city may be historically male, but it is a complex enough place to allow some maneuvering room for women" (Kurtz 1998:137). And further: "City offers some hope for women, allowing them to create a space for themselves in ways that the patriarchy of rural social structures cannot" (Kurtz 1998:157).

For the embodiment of these ideas of personal emancipation, independence, "maneuvering" and, finally, gender equality and empowerment, there came "a line of strong female characters […] who have appeared in novels from Kenya, especially in novels from women writers. While such characters were relatively scarce during the first generation of writers and even during the booming period of the 1970s […] they have multiplied during the post-Kenyatta years. In fact, their appearance may be classified as one of the most significant recent developments in the Kenyan novel" (Kurtz 1998:137).

The rapid growth of Kenyan women's novel and the development of its "strong female characters" has become even more significant in, re-phrasing Roger Kurtz, "post-Moi" years, that is, in the first quarter of the current century. And one significant feature that brings these characters together is that, unlike the novels of the previous decades, in which many of the female heroines came to the city from the rural areas (a classical example is Paulina in Oludhe-Macgoye's *Coming to birth*, 1986), the novels written after the year 2000 feature a different type of main character – urban-born, urban-grown, educated, working, middle-class women, with the widest range of professions. Some of these heroines have a village background, but their formation since their primary school years has been shaped by the city life, and they are the bearers of specifically urban mentality, molded by university education, urban employment and generally the whole complex of behavioural patterns pertinent to urban lifestyle. These women, as depicted in novels, since their formative years (mainly through schooling) have absorbed the ideas of emancipation, independence, and gender equality; they are trying their best to use these ideas as their guidelines

in life – and this, naturally, brings these women into sharp confrontation with the "traditional social patterns", particularly with traditional concepts of gender roles and female behaviour. Roger Kurtz in his study "asserted that the most important over-riding tension in contemporary Kenyan narrative is the dichotomy between tradition and modernity and that this dichotomy is manifested most fully in the city" (Kurtz 1996:158). In Kenyan women's novels this dichotomy is mainly manifested in the conflict between the ideas of gender equality and female empowerment, embodied by the female protagonists, and traditional patriarchal gender patterns, embodied by antagonistic male figures. This conflict reveals itself in all spheres of life, from domestic to educational, professional, political, etc.

One of the iconic figures in Kenyan women's literature of three recent decades is Margaret Ogola (1958 - 2011), the author of several novels and non-fictional books, medical doctor, and a public figure. In her two first novels – the dilogy *The River and the Source* (1994) and its sequel *I Swear by Apollo* (2002), which in itself has become a landmark in the development of Kenyan women's literature, setting a trend in many ways, for example genre-wise, founding a "women's family saga" (see below) – Ogola, among other important themes, also depicts urban environment and mentality as bringing liberation to women (although, in case of misuse, equally apt of bringing ruin). In *The River and the Source* this transition from a rural to an urban woman is initiated by the "matriarch" Akoko and her daughter Maria, when they consciously leave their village for a Catholic mission, and completed by Maria's grandchildren, educated urban people, whose new mentality allows them to change many obsolete notions and practices – for example, they choose their professions and their life partners at their sole discretion (Aoro marries a woman from a "rival" community, and Becky gets married to a white Canadian man). The sequel, *I Swear by Apollo*, develops the idea of the positive influence of the urban mentality to an even higher level. The story is centered on Alicia and John, the children of Becky (and the great-grandchildren of Akoko), whose high level of education, exposure and open-mindedness allow them to restore the harmony between ethnicities, races and families – being of mixed Kenyan-Canadian origin, they rebuilt the links with their Canadian father, Alicia gets married to Brett Stanley, a white Canadian, and John marries a Kenyan beauty Kandi Muhambe. Notable is that all these positive developments in the novel became possible largely due to the fact that Kenya, by the fantasy of the author, has elected its first female president, whose governing "had made many Kenyans dare to dream again, to hope again" (8).

Ogola's novel *Place of Destiny* (2005) largely features a diary of a woman bravely fighting with a fatal disease (which, sadly, turned out a grim prophecy for the author's life as well). This novel is also founded on a concept of fighting spirit running in the family – here the place of Akoko is taken by the main character Amor Lore, who, having grown up in traditional patriarchal background, where her brothers were treated like princes, and all the hard work was laid on her and her sisters' shoulders, through intelligence, hard work and determination made her way to school, started her own trade, and slowly made herself into the owner of a business empire, the holder of two university degrees, a loving wife and mother of a son and three daughters, who apparently inherit and develop their mothers virtues. One of the topmost merits for these women lies in putting their skills to the service of the society – especially helping its less lucky members. It is confirmed in the first place by Amor herself, when she drastically changes the lives of people

she meets – such as her house-help Karimi Inoti, or her devoted personal assistant Lanoi Sompesha. Exactly in this spirit of serving the others (and now, as seen, far beyond the borders of family) the novel presents another character of woman politician. This time it is Malaika, Amor's second daughter, who, initially trained as an architect and intending to devote her professional effort to designing affordable and good houses for the poor, soon realizes that her dream would require more than just an architect's effort – as she herself puts it, "good ideas alone never changed the world - political will does. […] My mother used to say that I could make a good politician and now I have something to politic about - let's see how far I will get" (168).

Ogola's last novel *Mandate of the People* (2012), published after her untimely death of cancer in 2011, apparently breaks the family saga pattern that runs through her three previous books – the novel covers the time span of only three years. Still it is a family epic to a certain extent, since the action revolves around the married couple of Suzanna Talam and her husband Adam Leo Adage. However, the main attention is given here not to the family matters, but to a much wider social plan – that of Kenya's electoral politics, which the author herself calls "Kenya's democratic jungle" (9). Seeing the wanton practices of parliamentary elections, Adam, a successful businessman, decides to enter the political arena in order to change the vicious circle. In his endeavors he is faithfully assisted by his wife Suzanne, a loving spouse and a talented lawyer. "Most of her clients were on the wrong side of the law for, according to her, the right reasons. They were generally activists of one kind or another, disadvantaged groups seeking justice, people suing government for whatever reason – she loved suing government, it needed to be sued often to keep it from stomping all over its citizens. She also loved fighting on those wrongfully incarcerated, or persons otherwise injured by the rich and mighty who did not want to pay" (38). Suzanne's professional qualities and spousal devotion helps Adam to win the elections and give his county a hope for a better future – in which a tangible part was played by other female characters of the book, such as Bonareri Bikoti, campaigning assistant to Adam, who through her efforts succeeds in a long clamber from a school "pregnancy dropout" to a college student and a political activist.

Education, employment and freedom of choices as the main components of social empowerment are hailed in the novels of other Kenyan female writers. Exactly these options, mainly provided by urban environment, help the characters of these novels to overcome the plight which they are supposed to face due to gender stereotypes experienced from the early childhood – that a girl child is just a commodity of her male relatives, and thus her very existence is at their disposal. Atrocious attitude of her relatives nearly ruined the life of Seith, one of the main characters of Georgina Mbithe's novel *Arise and Shine* (2007). Being an orphan, she was mistreated from her childhood years by her malicious aunt and grandma; but her male relations inflict on her much greater pain – first she was raped by her uncle, who became jealous of Seith's friendship with a classmate Tom; when after two years Seith, already a university student, decides to marry Tom, they temporarily share the house with Tom's brother Jared and his family. Right on the eve of the wedding, Jared, coming home earlier in order to catch Seith alone, rapes her, and then leaves for Tom and his suffering bride the only option – to leave his house. A couple of weeks

later traumatized and frazzled Seith receives the final blow – she loses Tom in a car accident. Only her friends Nancy, the novel's main character, and Charles, student CID officer and her future husband – saved Seith from the state of destruction inflicted on her by her male relatives. Nancy, a real model figure in the book, goes much farther with her emancipation – she is not satisfied only with professional and matrimonial advancement, but makes a successful political career, founding the Liberal Democratic Movement of Africa and winning a slamming victory at the parliamentary elections.

Similar plight of a males' victim befalls Ann, the heroine of Ketty Arucy's novel *Captive of Fate* (2007). The fifth child in a poor family, she lives in the house of her rich aunt, who pays for Ann's schooling in exchange to Ann's services as a housemaid. Morally mistreated by her aunt and cousins, Ann, however, receives a real abuse from her aunt's husband, Mr. Tumbo, who for the six years that she lived in his house "normally had treated her more than an object than a human being" (17). However, when at the age of 19 Ann's beauty bloomed, Tumbo decided that it was the time to rip the harvest. His first attempt to rape Ann was unsuccessful – she lost her consciousness, frightening the rapist (he thought the girl had died). However, Ann resolved not to tell anyone – which inspired Tumbo to the second attempt, which Ann fiercely resisted – only to be expelled from her aunt's place. "As Ann had predicted, the verdict favoured her offender. After long hear breaking interrogation, the blame ended up on her side. […] No one had reproved Tumbo for the crime. Not even his wife whose trust he had betrayed. She had transgressed against the master and had to suffer the consequences" (27). Only Ann's soon-followed enrolment to the university saved her from her further advances from her uncle – however, not from other assaults from the "mighty sex". Her university suitor Kombo proves to be a womanizer and bigamist, her husband Henry – a conservative male chauvinist, who forbids her to get employed an batters her, leading to the loss of their child. In the end Ann leaves Henry's house and starts a successful career in banking through the help of her faithful female friends.

Wairimu Ben, the main character of Martha Mburu's novel *The Mistress* (2015), almost repeats the fate of the two above-described female characters – only she is determined not to forgive her male offenders. Orphaned at a teen age, she is adopted by her uncle Joseph, who first secured Wairimu at a good school, but then "he started hitting on his niece. After all […] since she was young he had been dying to bed her. After a few unsuccessful attempts to get Wairimu to sleep with him, uncle Joseph finally raped her. […] In retaliation, Wairimu hated her uncle with a passion, but knew if she ran away, she would have nowhere to go and no money. So she let uncle Joseph have his way. One day she would revenge for taking advantage of her. Time flew, and before she knew it she was through with High School into Egerton University with a full tuition scholarship. Soon she was working as a financial controller at an insurance agency". Understanding that now her long-desired self-sufficient state enables her not only to fully stand on her own feet, but also to pay for her suffering, she resorts to straightforward action. "The day Wairimu moved her belongings out of uncle Joseph's house, she put a sachet of cocaine in one of his jacket pockets. Then she reported to the police that the uncle was a drug dealer and they would

find the evidence in this house. Sure enough they searched his house and found the cocaine. Uncle Joseph was arraigned in court and sentenced to jail for 10 years. Yes, Wairimu thought, let him languish with the bad boys for some years. She had finally gotten her sweet revenge" (18).

Sasha Nzioka, the main character in Monica Genya's novel *The Wrong Kind of Girl* (2004), also remembers her childhood as the darkest time of her life – in fact, due to the efforts of both of her parents. The pain of birth made even a thought of having another child unbearable for Lucy, her mother; for her father Jackson, a prominent businessman, , the perspective of having a son was therefore out of question – thus he developed deep rejection of his only child of the "wrong sex". Sasha tries, therefore, to find her consolation in studying – although even this does not satisfy her ever-nagging dad. The final blow comes when her father's partner, a businessman named Ochieng Omondi, tried to seduce her in her parents' house in their absence. Sasha retaliated with "her hails drawing blood as they raked down his face" (189). Her father's reaction – "Jackson apologised for the stupid, embarrassing behaviour of his daughter" and "declared that if he were going to lose the deal he had been trying to cut with Ochieng because of his ugly daughter's stupidity, then he would kill her" (181) – draws Sasha to suicide attempt, after which she realized two things: "one that she wanted to be a doctor, and two that she never wanted to see her parents again" (181). To pursue this, she demands from her parents to "deposit money on my account for me to live on until I can stand on my own two feet" – otherwise she will sell the story of Ochieng's advances towards her to the newspapers. Sasha finishes the medical school, becomes a successful neurosurgeon, and finally reconciles with her parents after ten-year absence. Equally strong female character is drawn by Genya in her novel *The Other Side of Love* (2004) – the heroine Mokami Keiwa, after being deserted by her fiancé on the wedding day, decides to "prove her worth for herself" by going to England, where makes a career from a café waitress to a singing star, and triumphantly returns to Kenya, where after a long chain of vicissitudes reunites with her long-lost sweetheart, who eloquently comments on her success: "If you were not talented, hard-working and ambitious – you would never have gotten where you are today" (73)

Wanjiru Waithaka in her first novel *The Unbroken Spirit* (2005) tells a similar story of successful struggle. Young and intelligent woman Tessa has worked for three months in a company as a research executive, and her boss Mr. Kibuchi is sexually harassing her. Tessa approaches the managing director Mr. Kirubi and asks him to talk to Mr. Kibuchi so that he stops harassing her. This doesn't go well with Mr. Kibuchi; he denies everything and warns Tessa: "This is the corporate world Tessa, a man's world, with men's rules. For a while I thought you were an intelligent ambitious woman […] You are naïve and foolish. If I had my way, you wouldn't be working here again." An intelligent and ambitious woman must necessarily provide sexual favours for her superior – this implication made by Mr. Kibuchi infuriates Tessa, but she finds it increasingly hard to fight with her boss' malicious attempts. Twice Tessa is denied a promotion by Mr. Kibuchi. When she finally confronts him, he fires her on the spot. She approaches the chairman of the company, and he, impressed by Tessa's logical and honest self-defense, gives her another chance, which luckily corresponds with Mr. Kibuchi's transfer to the Uganda office with

a larger pay. On hearing about this, Tessa's friends, although congratulating her with getting the job back, are still annoyed – apparently Kibuchi "got away with it". But as Tessa tells them, "you feel I tried to fit into the system instead of fighting it. But doesn't the fact that I fought my own battle and won mean something? It is a small victory and may not change anyone's future but my own, but the fact is I didn't give up or run" (112). In her second novel *Duel in the Savanna* (2015) Waithaka draws almost a "Renaissance-like" female character – Sophie Gitwana, a college student from a poor background, after being left pregnant by her rich lover has to leave her studies, but makes a successful career first in second-hand trading, then in fish farming, and after various ordeals (including the kidnapping of her twins) attains her long-deserved family happiness.

The authors of the novels highlighted in this section seem to pursue one purpose – to affirm the role-model character of an urban educated working middle-class woman, which, with all the probable differences, feature basic common traits: she is independent, capable to defend herself and others, rules her own life – and all this largely owing to her urban mentality, which breeds the emancipation concepts from the formative age. The female heroines of these novels use the urban space and their urban mentality for the long-term purpose of their emancipation, empowerment and the achievement of general equality, equity and mutual respect between genders. Each of the discussed novels, thus, has a hopeful, inspiring and promising finale, in which the female characters manage to solve their social and matrimonial problems with a perspective for a brighter future, both on the personal and societal levels.

As a sort of "antithesis" to the above assertion it is worth to mention here a novel which propagates a polar viewpoint – escape from the city as the den of vice and oppression. *The Sacred Seed* (2006) by a prominent Kenyan female writer Rebecca Njau features a fantastic reality of an imaginary African country, and tells the story of resistance of a village community, leading peaceful and spiritual life in the sacred forest under the guidance of two courageous women – Mumbi, a forest prophetess, and her assistant Tesa, the main character of the novel, musician and artist. The community, supported by supernatural powers and obviously symbolizing tradition in its positive aspects, and the forces of good, is endangered by the forces of evil, embodied in the novel by the figure of dictator President Chinusi, dwelling in the capital city of Raiboni (anagram of Nairobi) in his fortified residence called The Castle. Chinusi and his henchmen (among them the local pastor, who was waging long-term war against Mumbi's community) want to get hold of the forest in order to demolish it and use the land for their own purposes. However, through their own courage and with the help of divine interference, the members of the community manage to overthrow the hateful dictator and give the people of the country hope for a brighter future.

Family epic: road of hope or circle of dereliction?

The genre of family epic is well-rooted in Kenyan literature – suffice it to recall *The broken drum* (1988) by David Maillu or *Water under the bridge* (1991) by Yussuf Dawood. The founder of the genre in Kenyan women's writing is Margaret Ogola, with her dilogy about Sigu family – *The river and the source* (1994) and its sequel *I swear by Apollo* (2002). In these books Ogola traced the fortunes of Akoko, the "matriarch" of the family, and of several generations of her descendants, tightly interwoven with the history of their country, and in both books she makes a very optimistic forecasting about its future. The female characters of the dilogy embody the author's vision of a brighter future not only for Kenya, but for the entire mankind, which, in compliance with the ideal of harmony between peoples, genders and races, the ideal started by Akoko and carried by her descendants into a new century and a new millennium, may hopefully model its inter-relations on the family principle, becoming "each other's relatives"; "preference of your own should not lead to hatred of others" (137).

Ogola's successful venture into the family epic genre seems to have inspired female writers of the new generation, and the survey of the recent developments in this trend of Kenyan women's writing should definitely be started with two major works of Yvonne Owuor, that elevated Kenyan women's writing onto a new qualitative level. Having gained her literary fame by the novella *Weight of Whispers* (2003) about the victims of Rwandan genocide (see Krüger 2011), she established her reputation as one of the topmost modern writers in Kenya with her novels *Dust* (2013) and *Dragonfly Sea* (2019). The volume of critical writing on *Dust* is even currently about to exceed the volume of the book itself; it appears to be the same about her latest novel *Dragonfly Sea*, which, although published early in 2019, already caused a growing agitation among the critics.

Both novels rather confidently fit into the category of a family epic/saga, since they portray the fortunes of one family over several decades (*Dust*) and even centuries (*Dragonfly Sea*). However, in the "her/story" of Kenya, which Owuor presents in *Dust*, she stands rather far from bright optimism intrinsic to Ogola's dilogy. In her novel Owuor sees Kenyan history, represented by the Odango family, as a vicious circle of dereliction, caused by one trait that unites all the characters – guilt. Each of the male characters of the book, regardless of origin, has in this or that way contributed to the horrors of modern Kenyan history – which largely shapes the fates of the female characters, Ajany Oganda and her mother Akai, turning them into victims of the "male-shaped" plight of the family and, on a larger scale, of the nation - "a country shooting its people and tearing out its own heart."

In *Dragonfly Sea* the dereliction, that shaped the recent history of Kenya in the previous novel, acquires virtually universal scale – and again, it is primarily manifested in the fate of the main female character. Ayaana, a young girl living on the island of Pate off the Kenyan coast, discovers her partial Chinese ancestry, that has its origins in a 15th-century shipwreck on Pate involving one of the great Chinese admiral Zheng He's fleets. Ayaana's heritage gives her the chance to study in China; to fly to Istanbul where she is victimized by a descendant of a powerful Turkish business family; and to return home to Pate – her only shelter from the dangerous world, permeated by the structures of violence. The novel harvests abundantly on various literary trends

and methods, history, religion, and may be rendered as the most daring attempt of an epic in East African literature since the books of Moyez Vassanji and Abdulrazak Gurnah.

Among the writers who seem to follow the same trend of family saga one can mention the name of Joy Odera, who debuted in 2012 with her novel *Under the Jacaranda*. In the same spirit of narrating the fortunes of a family over a large time span, Odera tells a moving story of Serene, as she travels between Johannesburg and Nairobi in search of her own past and her fraught family history, delving into the trials of an African family through the upheavals of post-colonial and modern Kenya. Spinning between the present and the past, crossing four decades, three countries and two continents, the author traces the heroine's growth and change through the complexities of family relations, deeply buried in the afflictions of history, leading to the climactic scene of her father's memorial service, where Serene and her relatives finally learn about the dark mysteries of the family – how the political rivalry between father and his kinsmen victimized female members of the family through rape, forced circumcision and forced marriage – but also about the inspiring ones, like how her father, a Luo, saved her future uncle, a Mau-Mau fighter, during Emergency, hence an ethnically mixed family of Serene, reminding the one from Ogola's dilogy. This symbol of rivaling communities united through family ties, coupled with the symbol that gave the novel its title – a patch of dried earth under the jacaranda tree in the family garden, which after father's memorial service starts to sprout young grass – express the author's hope for the brighter tomorrow of her family, her gender and country.

Adolescent novel: fighting for the younger generation

In an article published more than ten years ago in "The Journal of Children's Literature Studies" titled "Is there literature for adolescents in Kenya?" (Rinkanya 2007) I was trying to show that in the beginning of the current century Kenyan literature for adolescent readers was making only its first steps, going through the stage of formation. It should be noted, however, that within the last ten years Kenyan writing for adolescents has made enormous progress, presenting the public with dozens of titles. Among those a prominent place is held by the women authors, who target mostly female secondary and high-school students, and related reader groups.

It can be said that from the onset the works of Kenyan women authors who write for adolescent audience have been standing the farthest possible from what can be called purely entertaining or "escapist" literature. They do not tell their readers fantasy tales or romantic stories. In their works, Kenyan women writers address the burning problems of Kenyan youth.

In many of these works, a detailed treatment is given to the problems related to the "conversion" into a high school student. Especially for the graduates of provincial schools, the transition from the more or less uniform ethnic/cultural environment of their homes to the much more culturally diverse atmosphere of high schools presents multiple problems – from those of personal adaptation to problems of intercultural and interethnic strife. It must be noted that these problems are experienced by the characters regardless of their social standing. In *The Cliques* (2016) by Diana Gitau, the main character Soila Ngarabu, a girl from a lower middle class Nairobi

area, is desperately trying to join one of the school "cliques", where girls are united by their origins ("Nairobians" and "upcountry-girls") or preferences ("class-chops" and "Christian union"), only to be rejected by them all ("It seemed that Saint Monica was not the school for girls from Eastlands", 56). Shellsea Kega, the main character of Pasomi Mucha's *Shades of Life* (2010), comes from an affluent family, but faces the same adaptation problems in her new school. In both cases, the panacea that the authors offer lies in diligence and tolerance – Soila's determination about her studies helps her school win the literary contest, and to win for her the love of all the "cliques", Shellsea, due to her empathic and caring character, especially towards "less fortunate" members of the school community, soon becomes everyone's favourite, which also helps her to improve the relations with her own mother. In the world of today, one has to be open-minded and open-hearted to others, readily giving up habits and stereotypes – this is another message that the authors appear to put across to their audience. An unusual approach to this problem is used by Muthoni wa Gichuru in her book *The Carving* (2018). It is a story of a disabled boy with a talent for art who is forced to leave school and take up manual work when his mother falls ill. His father has abandoned the family years before, but a concerned teacher intervenes and gets him back into school. Despite frequent bullying by other students, he wins an art competition that marks a turning point in his life. As the author confessed in an interview, by her book she wanted to create awareness about treatment of the disabled, because "they are integral to any society and have a lot to contribute" (The East African, January 19, 2019).

Another theme that is profoundly treated in the works of Kenyan women writers addressed to the adolescent audience is that of "school love" and its consequences. The approaches to this topic that they demonstrate are variegated – some writers (such as the ones mentioned above) prefer depicting the model or ideal, platonic love-as-friendship relationship between school girls and boys, which, as the authors seem to hope, will set a good example for their readers. Others, however, do not hesitate to give the impartial picture of the harsh reality – but also to give and advice how it could be coped with. An illustrative example of such approach is given by Florence Mbaya – a major figure in Kenyan adolescent literature. Mbaya had addressed the school theme already in her first novel *A Journey Within* (2008), though in its "adult" aspect – the novel tells the story of a young female teacher in a provincial school. Her later books, however, are almost exclusively aimed at adolescent readers.

A high-school student Abigail, heroine of Mbaya's novel *Sunrise at Midnight* (2015), receives the first, and the harshest, blow in her young life from Richard, the brother of her best school friend Claire. Giving a poor girl a sleeping drug disguised as aspirin to cure her headache, Richard then took advantage of fully unconscious Abigail. The horror of teenage pregnancy was aggravated for Abigail, among other factors, by the fact that she did not know how it all happened – and further exasperated by the fact that Abigail's schoolmates started to badger her. Richard, the cause of all her troubles, preferred to disappear – he allegedly escaped to Mombasa looking for employment (after failing at school). The terrible situation, however, was turned into an almost happy one through tender and understanding attitude of her relatives. Her mother Erika not only persuades her daughter to keep the child ("abortion is a murder") and return to school, but also becomes her guardian saint in many other matters of life, from child-rearing to building the relationships with her supposed relatives. Her cousin Constance, a brave, determined, intelligent and highly modern young woman, helps Abigail with securing a place in a new mixed school, and

re-acquiring her self-esteem and confidence. In the novel's sequel *The Morning After* (2018) Abigail, already an established young woman, faces a no less complicated challenge – she has to accommodate in the family's house and life her step-brother Amos, a fruit of her father's once promiscuous behaviour, but benevolence and tolerance triumph over.

Among the topical issues in Kenyan society, and especially for the younger generation, drug addiction, human trafficking and sexual abuse feature prominently – and these issues are treated adequately in the works of women writers. Moraa Gitaa in her short novel *Shark Attack* (2017) tells a story of three youngsters from the author's native town of Mombasa, who, driven by poverty, are hired by the local drug dealer as couriers, nearly part with their lives, but are spared through the intervention of their relatives and friends assisted by the state bodies.

Gitaa also began her writing career with an "adult" novel *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold* (2008) – a moving story of a young Kenyan artist Lavina, saved from impending death by the love of her Italian sweetheart Giorgio. Her subsequent books, however, are mostly dealing with the problems of adolescent and young adult females; another eloquent example is her novel *Shifting Sands* (2012), which investigates the ills of modern Kenyan society through the lives of three female characters of young age. Although their lives are intertwined from the childhood years, they all bear different backgrounds – Kemu and Myra are Kenyan Africans while Shilpa is third-generation Kenyan-Indian and Latifah is third-generation Kenyan-Arab. These differences allow the author to provide impressive insights into many problems facing Kenya in the current century, such as gender discrimination, inter-generational tensions, economic marginalization, HIV and AIDS, the injustices suffered by the poor in this country, corruption and transnational crime – among the letter, drug abuse and human trafficking are depicted as being almost a routine reality in the life of the younger generation.

Kingwa Kamencu raises the above-mentioned topics in her book *To Grasp at a Star* (2005), which contains two stories. The title story tells about Makena, a Meru schoolgirl who incidentally won a beauty contest in her school. Disobeying her loving and wise father, she runs off to Mombasa to become a star model, only to nearly fall a victim to the conmen, who schemed to sell her as a slave in the Middle East. Fortunately, the interference of the father and state security bodies saved her from a dangerous finale. The second story, *Muddled Transition*, tells about Muthoni, a naïve secondary school graduate from Meru. Coming to a high school in Nairobi, she at first feels a loner, but quickly makes friends with Malaika, a well-spoiled daughter of a wealthy father. Malaika teaches her carefree ways, which soon lead Muthoni to exam failures, and introduction to drugs (again through Malaika's courtesy) puts Muthoni to a 'near brush with death'. Again, she is saved from dire consequences by the virtue of her friend Michael and the understanding of her parents. Learning from her mistakes, Muthoni graduates with flying colours and enters the medical faculty, thus fulfilling the dream of her young life.

Drug experience is the central theme of Nancy Mwanzia's novel *Short-changed!* (2010), in which the main character Barbara, the darling of her entire school, turns out to be a drug addict – and only the decision of her teachers and relatives to put her in the rehab saves her life from ruin.

The theme of sexual abuse is also movingly treated by Muthoni wa Gichuru in her novella *Breaking the Silence* (2012), about a girl who was gang raped and tells of her experience. The book was runner-up for the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature, short-listed for the Macmillan Prize for Africa and is now a school set-book in Rwanda.

In their works addressing adolescent audiences Kenyan women writers also deal with asperities of cultural extraction, such as gender inequality, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child labour, and education denial. Some of these topics are convincingly presented in Florence Mbaya's novel *Heritage High* (2011). The novel highlights the stories of four main girl characters, students of the Heritage High, a prestigious high school for girls two hundred kilometers from Nairobi. One of these characters, Raelle, who comes from the coastal area, almost falls a victim to the traditions of her community, perpetuated by her father. For the father of Raelle, his daughter is simply a commodity, which he intends to use for the increase of his wealth – since it is permitted (and even encouraged) by the community's traditions. As Raelle confesses to her friend Jessica, "I discovered my father had committed me to something without my knowledge… My parents have someone lined up for me for marriage already" (11). Mayeke, Raelle's father, is not even stopped by the fact that his daughter is only fourteen years old. To Jessica's comment, that this is against the law, Raelle answers bitterly: "My father is the lawmaker of our family, our clan actually, and he will use customs and traditions to do and get what he wants" (12). As it turns out, what he wants is money – and he is even rather unwilling to waste it on his daughter's school fees: "I think he is greedy," Raelle said. "If it was not for my elder married sister, who was also married off at thirteen, I would not be in school. She paid for my first term tuition fees, and perhaps out of shame, or pride, my father has been paying, but reluctantly… When it comes to tradition, a girl's education doesn't count for much" (13). Jessica gives Raelle a valuable advice: "The only way you can refuse, or escape, is for you to strive to make it to university. Even the most entrenched tradition cannot survive the onslaught of an educated woman" (13). Raelle tries her best to follow her friend's guidance, but her father has different plans – being afraid that his daughter's university dream may one day become a reality, he simply kidnaps Raelle from school to the custody of her prospective husband. However, the idea of the "onslaught of an educated woman" is already deeply rooted in Raelle's mind – she escapes from the shed, where her kidnappers keep her (in the process hitting one of them severely on the head), and reports the case to the police. Her father is arrested and imprisoned for 10 years; relatives disown Raelle, and she resides with her sister. She successfully passes the school examinations and hopes to make it to the university one day – her dream is to become a veterinarian. The writer openly opposes the obsolete and ossified traditions that turn women and girls into a commodity of their husbands and fathers; the writer is apparently has such a strong rejection of such "cultural practices", that she allows her character Raelle to resort to the violent actions and even to the help of the law. The recipe for success is the same – good education, further employment, and sympathetic attitude from friends and relatives – as in the case of Raelle, who was supported by her devoted friend and her loving sister.

The themes of forced marriage and its frequent companion – female genital mutilation – is also treated in the short novels by Renatta Chepkoskei and Florence Kirianki. In *Silent Wailing* (2018) Chepkoskei re-tells a plot already well-used in Kenyan women's literature – about Maasai girls escaping both trials with the help of their sympathetic relatives and progressive social organizations (see, e.g., a short story *Daybreak* by Cathy Wachiaya published on *Storymoja* website). Chepkoskei depicts the modern Maasai community as being comprised of two camps – those who embrace the traditional stance about women (among them there also females) and those who are fighting the old ways. In the end, the latter camp takes the upper hand, and even the diehard traditionalists (such as father and aunt of the heroine Naeku) acknowledge the harm of old and obsolete customs. In a more complicated way the theme is treated in *A Rebirth* (2016) by Florence Kirianki, where the trauma of forced circumcision underwent during the childhood years deeply influences the life of the heroine Nancy Achamba, a woman from a Central Kenya community, up to a mature age – the nightmares about the event, which she keeps on seeing until the eve of her thirty-second birthday, lead her to the asylum and are about to ruin her marriage.

In *Journey to Mombasa* (2010) Carol Kairo draws an array of characters that represent most of the major problems faced by the Kenyan youth: among the passengers of an express bus to Mombasa there is Mumbi, a teenage year girl whose father wants to forcibly circumcise her, then merry her off; Chege, the naïve son of a poor village polygamist who gets a second opportunity in life when he is sponsored to go to college; Pendo, a pregnant rebellious teenager on her way home to make peace with her parents after eloping; Joy, who is escaping from her mistreating husband; Tony, a young Kenyan home on holiday from America. Despite an attempted hijack of the bus, an attack of the lions in Tsavo and numerous other trials, they reach the destination, and for some of them the journey ends safely – Mumbi is saved by a sympathetic nun, Pendo reconciles with her parents; on the other hand, Joy's future remains unclear, Chege is robbed of his school fees by a "reformed" jailbird Musa, Tony is drugged and robbed by a company of road crooks. Her fellow Kenyans must become more sympathetic and understanding towards each other – this message the author seems to illustrate by the mottled fates of her characters.

It appears that in their texts addressed to adolescent audiences the writers are trying to address, openly and impartially, the problems focal to the younger generation of Kenyans, especially female ones, pursuing several main tasks – to warn their readers from repeating those mistakes that their characters made, to provide them with adequate recipes for dealing with these situations, and to alert the society about these problems and the ways to solve them. Again, I will stress that in their books, the authors advocate empathy, tolerance and careful attitude to every case described, on personal, family and social levels.

Women's adventure novel: angel of justice or devil of crime?

However significant, both quantity- and quality-wise, are the recent developments in Kenyan women's writing, there is one genre that has been exclusively male-dominated until the most recent times – that is, the adventure fiction. In fact, if one looks at Kenyan adventure novels published between the 1960s and 1980s, one will notice that not only were the authors exclusively male, but the novels generally followed the well-known formula 'brave male police inspector/ private detective/ security agent successfully completes his mission'. In some of these novels, the brave male investigator was at most helped by a devoted female secretary or assistant.

However, in the 1990s and especially 2000s there were significant changes both in Kenyan society and, correspondingly, in Kenyan fiction. The paradigm of evolution from "exclusively "wives", "mothers" and "widows" to "a variety of social and political roles", outlined by Marie Krüger and quoted in the Preface, is also quite applicable to Kenyan adventure fiction. In many novels, especially by women writers, females start not only to take more and more part in the action, but more frequently than not assume the leading roles, giving their male colleagues at best equal or even secondary parts.

The pioneering author in this sense seems to be Monica Genya with her debut novel *Links of a Chain* (1996). The events described in the novel are ignited by a stunning (although purely fantastic) geological discovery - huge resources of oil are incidentally found in Kenya; as the author puts it, "in fact, two-thirds of the country was sitting on one giant oil-well" (Genya 1996: 32). A group of vicious-minded Kenyans – among them high-rank politicians and specialists – backed by a French electronic magnate and an American oil tycoon, naming themselves the Knights of the Round Table and hiding behind the names borrowed from the Arthurian legend, plan a coup-d'état in order to divide the country into nine 'United States of Kenya'. Each of the states will be ruled solely by one of the 'Knights'. In order to destabilise the situation in the country, they have assassinated several prominent politicians, and are planning to murder the first female vice-president of Kenya, Mrs Janet Musyoka. Their plans incidentally leak to the top-secret investigation department in the country – Bureau of Investigational Operations (B.I.O.) – but the plotters manage to kill the B.I.O.'s head officials. The only survivor, partly owing to luck, partly to her high professional qualities, is Susan Juma, one of B.I.O.'s top agents, who manages to untangle the plot and eliminate its participants.

It looks like that the figure of the female investigator working for the top-secret government agency was introduced in this novel for the first time in Kenyan fiction. Moreover, it seems that the aim of the author was not to create a kind of 'James Bond in a skirt'. Definitely, Susan Juma, the agent, possesses some of the necessary combat qualities – she is a first-class shooter, she can fly a plane and even drive a tractor – but apart from all this, the writer apparently intended to create a kind of female role model, the character admirable for her courage and strength and likeable first of all for her human and, moreover, female traits. She works for her country out of patriotic devotion and not for money (as it is indicated in one of the chapters, "B.I.O. agents were not paid a fortune" – page 61), she is devoted to her friends, faithful, and after all very feminine – in the hardest moments of her life she lets out very genuine tears. That is how Susan describes herself:

> "I fear drinking most of all because it makes you lose control. I dislike men who cheat on their wives and people who don't have any loyalty except to money and power. My dream is to find happiness and my ambition is to achieve my dream. I like peanut-butter sandwiches,

listening to classical music and you", she ended with a small smile in his direction" (237) (emphasis mine - AR).

Yes, Susan's life as a woman is not thinkable without *his* presence – and 'he' definitely appears on the pages of the novel in the shape of Chain, the second main character, former agent of B.I.O., presently – infallible private detective. It is he who helps Susan Juma to complete the mission, it is he who comes to her rescue in the most dangerous situations, and it is he whom Susan eventually falls in love with – and the feeling is mutual, for the novel ends up with Chain's awkward, but because of that even more charming marriage proposal.

A different type of female investigator is drawn in Wanjiku wa Ngugi's debut novel *The Fall of Saints* (2015). In this novel the author with commendable writing prowess (her literary talent may well have been passed genetically – she is the junior daughter to Ngugi wa Thiong'o) depicts a young woman who had passed the reverse way – from seemingly blissful marriage to the nightmares of being a victim of the criminal plot, headed by her husband. Mugure, a young Kenyan woman educated and living in the United States, is happily married to an American lawyer named Zack; the only shadow that is marring their joy is Mugure's childlessness. Zack's seemingly successful initiative to adopt an orphaned child from his wife's native Kenya somehow arouses Mugure's suspicions. Soon, Mugure's bright and inquisitive mind leads her to an international criminal cartel, specialising in killing babies and selling their body parts for transplantation; and her husband proves to be the cartel's boss. Mugure's life, as well as lives of many other people, is in danger. However, through her painstaking effort, and with the help of two brave male detectives – one African-American, one Kenyan – Mugure manages to put the criminals into the hands of the law and pay personal revenge on Zack by shooting him at the escape attempt.

At first glance, Mugure, the novel's main character, is rather different from Susan Juma from Monica Genya's book. First, Mugure is not a professional detective – the investigation she undertakes is pressed upon her by the concurrence of circumstances. Second, her perspective in life is also different, – while Susan is going to contract a long-awaited marriage with Chain, Mugure, who also manages to arrange in passing the marital life of her friends, herself intends to dedicate her life to the upbringing of her son, feeling "fed-up" with the joys of wifehood.

However, a closer comparison between Susan and Mugure reveal tangible similarities in their characters. First, both young women are determined to solve the deadly riddle they are faced with through their own effort, without waiting for the law structures to come to their support; they accept the assistance from their male colleague as welcomed, but not decisive. Second, both are aware that they live in the evil world, and usually the first victims of this evil are women (and, by extension, innocent children) – and in fighting this evil women are to rely mostly on themselves. For this purpose, Susan chooses a traditionally "male" career of the police officer; Mugure also equips herself for the fight: she takes lessons of a martial art called Krav Maga and later – a course in sniper shooting; both skills in the end enable her to finalise the matter and to pay her last revenge.

And third, the two young women are ready to fight evil in general – not only that evil which endangers their lives or rights, but any evil that threatens other people, regardless of the gender, ethnicity, age or race, in any form this evil may take – be it a syndicate of political schemers or a

murderous international cartel. This humanistic pathos also brings the two women together, as representatives of a new type of female character.

It must be said, however, that Kenyan adventure novels by women authors nurture not only this ideal image of a female warrior that fights evil. Contrary to that, certain female writers create in their texts female characters that may be regarded as embodiments of evil – to such an extent that they outplay in their evil games their male partners or counterparts, also highly experienced in mordant activities.

In her novel *Of Goats and Poisoned Oranges* (2014) the author, Ciku Kimeria, creates the image of the main character, Wambui Njogu, an experienced schemer, who largely harvests on the examples and trials from the outside world. She has been surrounded by evil-doers of both genders from her early years – starting from her own father, a chief, who during the struggle for independence "had sided with the mzungu" (15) and increased his wealth with the additional land that he got from mzungu for his loyalty. Her mother is her father's good match – as she confessed to her daughter in her old age, she gained her husband's favours by presenting him with several children, which proved his fertility, conceived from other men, since her husband was in fact sterile. Her mother's example inspired Wambui in her own marriage – having discovered that her husband Njogu is infertile, she cold-bloodedly sleeps with their servant, later posing his child as Njogu's. During her life she harmed a lot of other people around her – her niece Wandia, whom she pressed into having an abortion, her son King'ori, who flees his parents' house, confessing to his father that "you two had messed me up enough growing up" (104). The longest sufferer, however, is her own husband Njogu, and the peak of Njogu's miseries – and Wambui's villainies – comes when Wambui discovers Njogu's love affair with Nyambura, his secretary. Wambui sees that as a perfect occasion to blackmail her husband: "If I so much as hear you have seen her again, I am going to go to the cops with the documents I have from that 1988 land deal… to put you in jail for life" (86). But she does not limit herself with threats – she thinks of stopping his love affair for good by eliminating her rival Nyambura. Wambui goes into hiding in Dubai under fake identity, but before that stuffs her blood-stained clothes into Nyambura's closet. "Though my body was never found, she was sentenced to life imprisonment in Langata Women's Prison" (4). In prison, Nyambura loses her mind.

Evil deeds are avenged in this or that way – this thought seems to be perpetuated by the author, when she finally makes her "exemplary woman villain" to meet her quits. When Wambui secretly returns to Kenya to start life anew under her fake image of Peris Wanjiru, she meets unexpected fierce resistance in the face of her husband. During their last and fatal meeting, in the outburst of fury Njogu strangles Wambui to death – thus putting an end to her life and his long-time torture. It is notable that Njogu, a crook himself, is nevertheless spared by the author from punishment – apparently the suffering that he got from the evil mind and actions of Wambui far supersedes his own misdeeds.

The image of a far more successful woman evil doer is created by Moraa Gitaa in her novel *Hila* (2014). The novel tells a story of Hila, a young female casino worker, who, judging by her profession and her name (which in Swahili means "trickery, machination"), may well be suspected to be the villainous figure in the story. But contrary to that, Hila is rather a victim – she is in fact a young single mother, who works for a meager salary of a cashier in a Mombasa casino, desperately struggling to make ends meet. Her boyfriend and occasional "sponsor", a petty crook called Njoroo, one day offers her to participate in "something real" – an organized bank robbery,

which, if successful, will end her poverty for good. The plan proves to be effective – the gang, consisting of six people, manages to steal sixty million shillings and get away with it. This, however, does not bring Hila the enormous riches that she was dreaming of; she is awarded, according to her understanding, in a higher manner – a young bank teller Richard, who also partook in the plan, becomes her prospective husband. The money, however, is taken by a character who, as it turns out, masterminds the plan – Mwendee, a woman taxi driver.

In the first chapters of the novel Mwendee is given a rather humble attention – in fact, she is only a "getaway driver" of the gang, whose only role is to drive the gang away after the successful robbery. However, as the action unfolds, Mwendee proves to be the grim figure behind the ploy – even more grim as she turns out to be the real winner of this baleful game. "She was a robber par excellence. The taxi business was a front to prove she was a taxpayer like the average law-abiding Kenyan. Nobody had been able to prove that she was anything else. Word had it that Mwendee was semi-illiterate. But literate or not, she was quite rich and lived in a mansion" (122).

After the successful robbery, the stolen money are put into an old rusty fridge and buried in a palm grove in the outskirts of Mombasa. The gang, however, is discovered by two police officers, Kipng'etich and Mulwa. Mwendee, learning that, shows her true character of a cold-blooded, calculating and manipulative vermin. She gives Mulwa an "indecent proposal", as she openly called it: "Once we get rid of Njoroo and Mwisho, and we have Danson the bank manager, Richard the teller and Hila on our side, we have ten million each, tax-free. This includes your boss Kipng'etich 'cause he has to be in on this too" (124-5). Mwendee's plan works perfectly – the two policemen are rather easily bought over (Kipng'etich, initially hesitant, was talked into it by his much less scrupulous subordinate), Njoroo and his pal Mwisho are killed in a police ambush, and Mwendee in the end lays her hands on the larger part of the money, as presented in the spectacular last episode of the novel, where Mwendee, having lured the unsuspecting couple into her house, simply robs them of their part of the loot at gunpoint.

"There is one million shillings in there for the two of you to share. It is all you deserve. You've done nothing to earn ten million apiece. I want you to get out of my house, and I don't want to ever see you two again." […]

Mwendee smiled at their retreating figures. She let out a cold, mirthless chuckle. She had outwitted even Mulwa and Kipng'etich. She was getting better and better" (158).

In four novels discussed in this section, the authors seem to portrait four different main woman characters with one aim – to project their visions of female agency. However different, if not even opposed, these characters could be – in fact, the mentioned texts portray two brave females successfully defending the law and two other no less bravely and no less successfully breaking it – the authors seem to pursue the same purpose of, first, demonstrating their ability "to beat men in their own game" on both sides of the barricade. Secondly, from their opposed viewpoints the characters demonstrate what they deem proper and free to do and achieve in pursuit

of whatever goals or values they regard as important, their ability to make purposeful choices. The fact that these choices lead these women characters to the opposing camps stresses, in my view, the universal and dialectic character of female agency – the characters' "individual assets, human, social and psychological capabilities" (Samman, Santos 3) dictate them which side to choose. And, finally, the choices these women make seem to be especially notable in the modern African context. On the continent where for centuries "traditions that have been known to historically limit women within an unfavourable social structure and its characteristic male power system" (Tonney 57), the appearance of such characters as drawn in the discussed novels seems to be "a sign of the times". Now African woman demonstrates her own capability to exercise their freedom in pursuit of liberally chosen and desirable ambitions in life – and these ambitions, as seen above, in terms of their social dimension may be marked with both positive and negative signs.

Unfortunately, the volume limitations of this paper do not allow to outline, at least briefly, some other recent trends in, who are not characterized with the abundance of authors and titles, but comprise important and interesting parts of the panorama of Kenyan women's literature. Among them is the historical novel, which is represented by the last publication of one of the "mothers superior" of Kenyan women's writing Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (1928-2015) *The Farm Called Kishinev* (2005), that tells about the community of Jewish migrants in Central Kenya in the 1930s; Njeri Kibui in *Days of Affliction* (2010) speaks about the Mau-Mau times, whereas the action of *Wanjira* (2007) by Wambui Githiora is set in the 1970s. Critical attention should also be drawn to the novels of Stella Kahaki Njuguna, published from 2000 to 2005, whose writing style puts her between "popular" and "serious" literature – and I sincerely hope to fill this gap in the forthcoming publications.

Conclusion: feminism unbound

Casting an overall glance at the novels highlighted in this paper, it would not be too difficult to notice, that the views and orientations expressed by their authors are firmly based on feministic stance – namely, a variety of it known as "postcolonial feminism". According to Raj Kumar Mishra, "The matter of fact is that postcolonial women refuse to remain passive and continue to bear male-oppressive environments. These women seek to emancipate themselves through education, struggle, and hard work. The postcolonial men re-colonized the bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their cultural values. Postcolonial feminism is primarily concerned with deplorable plight of women in postcolonial environment […] Postcolonial feminists argue for women emancipation that is subalternized by social, cultural, or economic structures across the world" (132-3). And thus: "Postcolonial feminism […] comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse"(130). Exactly for these purposes Kenyan women writers create the role-model characters, which inspire their readers with the ideas

of gender parity, equality and equity – it must be noted that in most of the novels the heroines are in the long run assisted by positive male characters, who build their relationship with the opposite sex on the mentioned principles. As discussed further by Mishra, "Postcolonial feminine writers […] seek for balance, mutual respect and harmony. […] The matter of fact is that they want to remove age-old constrictions laid on women's lives, and live on par with men. They expect support from their partners"(133).

Endnote

[1] Prose is generally the most representative part in Kenyan women's literature; although there are renowned poets, such as Micere Githae Mugo and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, as well as the new ones, like Shailja Patel, Sitawa Namwale, Wanja Thairu, Shiku Waweru, Philo Ikonya, Pamela Ateka, Caroline Nderitu, and playwrights such as Rebecca Njau, Nyambura Mpesha and Njoki Gitumbi, the women's prose by far surpasses other types of writing simply by the number of published titles – and, as it was mentioned in the Preface, by the diversity of generic forms, artistic methods and themes.

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