

Alina Rinkanya

Alina Rinkanya teaches African and World Literature in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.
Email: arinkanya@gmail.com

Woman for President? 'Alternative' future in the works of Kenyan women writers

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The article traces the emergence of 'alternative', positive vision of the future of African countries under the rule of female leaders in Kenyan women's literature, using as examples three novels by Kenyan women writers—Rebecca Njau, Margaret Ogola and Monica Genya. The study comes to a conclusion that the aim of these authors was not to create another 'trivial utopia', but to draw a picture of a possible and accomplishable future which may serve as a motivation for the reading public. **Keywords:** African female leadership, African literature, Kenyan women writers, utopian visions of the future.

Introduction

Gloomy and nearly apocalyptic vision of the future, characteristic for many works of contemporary African writers, mostly portraying the totalitarian dystopian societies of the future, ruled by various dictators, seem to find an alternative standpoint in recently produced texts by some writers from Eastern Africa. It should be mentioned, first, that contemporary authors from East African countries (I will mostly be referring to the period of 1990s and 2000s) are dealing with present-day reality, with less concern for future prognoses. At the same time, those writers who have in any way dealt with the topic may be broken, conditionally, into two categories. While some of them draw dismal dystopian pictures of future developments in various (unnamed or imaginary) African countries (it especially applies to the adepts of the so-called 'experimental' or 'new' novel in Swahili (see Khamis 2005), others seem to have a more hopeful image of the continent's 'days beyond'. In their works, the oppressive rule is eventually destroyed by will and act of protagonists, supported by the mass of the country's people. What is even more significant—in most of the cases, the protagonists (mostly male) are winning through active support of their female allies. The most remarkable in that sense among the recent works is the latest novel by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o—*The Wizard of the Crow* (2006) originally written in the author's mother tongue of Gikuyu and self-translated into English. The novel depicts the rule of a ruthless dictator, nicknamed the Ruler, in the fictitious republic of Aburiria, destroyed by two brave young protagonists, a young man Kamiti and his girlfriend Nyawira. In many novels, this 'female support' becomes the crucial factor of victory, since the 'female supporters'

are semi-divine creatures with supernatural powers—even in the novels by Swahili language writers the hero manages to withstand the evils of the dystopian world, pictured in these books, with the help of a magical female supporter (whose assistance sometimes gives a hope of victory over the evil forces and a brighter future (see *Nagona* [1989] and *Mzingile* [1990] by Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi).

The idea of a brave female character that gives the others (and the readers) a hope for ‘alternative’, positively portrayed and rather utopian, then dystopian future, is strongly expressed in the novels by East African female writers from Uganda to Tanzania. In this study, I try to trace the emergence of such character and the ‘alternative’ vision of the future that she represents in Kenyan women’s writing, using as examples three novels by Kenyan women authors published from 1996 to 2003. The novels under study represent different forms of the genre—from a novel-as-parable, strongly ‘spiced up’ with magical realism, to a social critical and detective novel—but in all three, a figure of a strong woman as an agent of an alternative, positive future is given an important place in the novel’s system of characters.

The following discussion of the works by three Kenyan women writers is largely informed by the theoretical points made by Susan Andrade in her seminal study of feminisms in African fiction in the period of thirty years up to 1988—*The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms* (2011)—where one of the main aspects of the argument is the representation of the national allegory in female fiction. She bases her argument on the assumption that in the period under study the nation was represented by women writers through family, and the basic concerns of women’s literature was “critiques of local patriarchies” (203) and the creation of “domestic tale of women’s emancipation from local patriarchy” (205), while nowadays “one can say that increasingly African women write about politics, including national politics” (207). She confirms that latter point by stating that “no longer can we say that sub-Saharan black women hesitate to represent the nation in conjunction with fully developed female characterization” (206). In the sections below, I will demonstrate that the utopian allegories presented in the novels by three Kenyan women writers—and embodied by female characters—have a purpose to “represent the nation squarely and explicitly”, to create a new form of national allegory with a further purpose to motivate the readers.

Rebecca Njau: Human virtue helped by magical forces

At first glance, among the works by East African women writers of English expression a good example of the ‘disappointing’ vision of the future could be found in the latest novel by a Kenyan author Rebecca Njau. In *The Sacred Seed* (2003) Njau portrays the rule of a merciless dictator, who reigns the people by fear and cruelty. However, later in the novel it is changed by quite an opposite vision, that of an ideal community founded on the principles of love, justice and hard work.

Among the works discussed in this article, the novel by Njau appears to be especially notable, since the author, apart from being one of the major names in Kenyan writing, may also be deemed as one of the founding figures of East African women's literature, a trend that has gained momentum during the last three decades, the time when in Kenyan literature "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 [...] Although social expectations seem to define them exclusively as "wives", "mothers" and "widows", women appear in a variety of social and political roles" (Kruger, *Female Characters in Contemporary Kenyan Women's Writing* 61).

I have called Njau's novel especially notable, because in Kenyan women's literature, as mentioned above, the visions of the brighter future is frequently associated—or, rather, represented—by a strong female character, whose commitment to the people and active nature actually make this future feasible. Her novel, in fact, features two of such characters; it 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 badly used and oppressive modernity, or 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. Along with other repugnant traits of his character, Chinusi is an epitome of male chauvinism and dominance; he takes pleasure in raping talented women (Tesa herself became one of his victims before fleeing to the forest sanctuary). Chinusi and his henchmen (among them the local pastor Jonah, who was waging long-term war against Mumbi's community) want to get hold of the forest in order to clear 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 (whose name is not specified in the book) hope for a brighter future.

The characters of Mumbi and Tesa form, as it appears, 'two sides of one coin'; the only difference between them is that Mumbi is the founder of the community and Tesa—her successor. Both stand hand in hand against the forces of evil, epitomised by President Chinusi; both succeed in defeating them and—most importantly—in providing the community members with the foundation for the brighter future well deserved by them in their defence of good.

Of course, this brighter future can not be built through the efforts of only two women—and Mumbi and Tesa manage to inspire and commit to devoted and creative work other females in the community (many of them joined it seeking refuge—for

example, a young woman Lina became a victim of ethnic conflicts; some other girls fled to the forest to escape genital mutilation). Male members are also accepted and encouraged to live and work with others—such as painter Muturi, son of pastor Jonas; moreover, Mumbi and Tesa are assisted by the council of male elders—thus, the equality of gender and age is also preserved. Even the difference in origin is not an obstacle—one of the most active members of the community is African-American missionary Ellen, who, before being sent back to the US through the evil scheming of Chinusi, manages to provide her African sisters (and other members of the community) with a new foundation for future prosperity:

“I must show my gratitude to the women in a practical way. I admire their courage and hard work. I must help them to become more economically self-sufficient. I want to teach them a new craft. I want them to learn how to weave using a simple loom which they can make. I want us to make baskets from wild plants and find a market for them. They must get economic benefit from their hard work”. (182);

“When I go back to the USA, I will look for a market for your crafts.” (183);

“The following day, just before sunrise, Ellen and Nini walked to the spring and collected plants from inside the bushes and took them back to Nini’s homestead where, with Tesa and Mumbi, they sat inside all morning, learning a new skill. After five days, they were able to produce enough threads to start weaving on a simple loom. They also learned how to make dyes from plants. They sang with joy as they worked and they promised one another that they would never let anyone subdue their resolve to fight for the emancipation of all women *and others* who were oppressed”. (186, my emphasis)

Not only this, but all kinds of free and unbound creativity are flourishing—“Tesa had spent most of her time working and inspiring young people to be creative. Consequently, many of them had learnt to express themselves freely in music” (209). The principles of governance in the sanctuary, free of the vices of old power systems, are explained by Mumbi, its creator and keeper: “Any one of you is free to lead the way, as long as it is the right way. Ours should not be an authoritarian leadership. We don’t want the Jonahs and the Chinusis among us. They do not belong here. Our intention should not be to glorify the self but to recognise each other’s talents and strive to develop them to the full” (209). As it could be understood, the new principles work—the people of the sanctuary are not only able to resist the advances of enemy forces, but attract more and more newcomers from different parts of the country. All this became possible because of the supervision of two strong women with semi-magical qualities—Mumbi and Tesa—an allegoric picture of woman leader (according to the author, magical powers help only those who have their own courage and

determination). Of course, the novel does not present a 'real' recipe for a better future—but an allegorical picture of the author's ideas about it. The present day reality offered nothing but a brutal dictatorship—so we must revive truly democratic forms of governance, based on equality, commitment and voluntary participation.

The models of the 'alternative' future that the writer suggests are obviously not new—they could be found in many works of modern African literature from its beginnings; for example, in the 'recipes' offered as far back as 1960s in the novels of Cameroonian author Remy Medou Mvomo. In his novel *Africa Ba'a* (1969) he also depicts an ideal village, whose inhabitants reach the economic prosperity by weaving baskets and selling them abroad. This concept of 'going back to the roots' is long-lived—even Njau's compatriot, one of the major Kenyan writers Meja Mwangi in his novel *The Return of Shaka* (1989) also suggests "to plough up the tarmac roads [...] and to prove everyone that you can get back to your roots and to live on simple fruits of the earth—sorghum, yam and cassava" (70). In that sense, Njau's vision of the future may be offering nothing new; what does, however, appear novel in her speculations is that the leading part in the building of this future is given to women (in the mentioned novels by Mvomo and Mwangi, the agents of progress are male protagonists). Male leadership brings cruelty and misfortune—therefore, the future should be put into the hands of women, who will be able to make it better for everyone, even at the expense of their own personal happiness: at the end of the novel, Tesa has to give up the idea of her marriage to Muturi and fully gives herself to the service of the society.

Margaret Ogola: The source of the new river

As I mentioned above, a number of women writers in Kenya are depicting the future as the time of real women empowerment, and one of the most picturesque examples of this is the portrayal of the (hypothetic) first woman President of Kenya. Whereas a few writers contemplate such an opportunity in their books, the most vivid examples are given in two novels, *I Swear by Apollo* (2003) by the late Margaret Ogola and *Links of a Chain* (1996) by Monica Genya.

Margaret Ogola's novel, the second in her short but prolific writing career, is in fact a sequel to her first work, *The River and the Source* (1994), which became one of the bestsellers in present-day Kenya, a part of the school literature curriculum, and gained her fame in her lifetime. While *The River and the Source* is an epic saga of several generations of a family from Western Kenya, strongly layered with the ideals of women's emancipation and empowerment, *I Swear by Apollo* is an idealistic vision of the future, depicting life 'as it should be' under the benevolent and protective rule of the first (however unnamed) woman President of Kenya. In this new country, the novel's characters manage to overcome most of the burning problems of present-day Kenya. They defeat tribal and racial prejudices through mixed marriages (Ogola

marries a Luo gentleman to a Kikuyu lady, thus eliminating rivalry between two historically competing communities; and an African girl to an English Canadian, thus lifting racial bounds), combine African traditions with European innovativeness (John, a male protagonist, is a neurosurgeon and 'flying doctor'—but he intends to bring up in his future son by old African methods, whose "advantages are so obvious"), and generally comprise the author's ideal of new Kenyans, people that are free and unprejudiced in thoughts and actions. A reader's logical question "how come?"—i.e., what made the existence of such an ideal society possible—is answered literally on the opening pages of the novel. All this became practicable for the same reason as in Njau's book—because of the existence of a strong-willed female leader, considerate about the well-being of her compatriots. In Ogola's version, this utmost ideal of modern African female is embodied in the figure of the first woman President of Kenya.

"Her Excellency [...] was a tough and fearless woman known to face down armed policemen—at a time when a law of the jungle was rife. She was also a darling of the international community and the intellectual fraternity [...] She had made many Kenyans dare to dream again, to hope again. Of course she had many avowed enemies, especially those who had brought the country to its knees through massive institutionalized corruption. She had treated them with the same ruthlessness with which they raped the country before bleeding it dry [...] Many were surprised that a woman could bring such cold ferocity in the active governance. She seemed to have an instinct for the jugular and was not afraid to use it. The corrupt hated their guts and prayed for her demise daily." (Ogola 8)

Her Excellency—for the name of the first woman President is not given in the text—not only manages to uproot, presumably alone, the machinery of massive institutionalized corruption, which her male predecessors were defeated with, not only to bring to a new level the country's intellectual potential (for she started her political career from the post of the minister of science and education), but, what is more, gave to her fellow Kenyans a chance "to dream again, to hope again"—and their dreams and hopes (and obviously, and even more, the dreams and hopes of the novel's readers) are embodied in Ogola's characters. In the book one will hardly find any negative character (with a possible exception of a certain Napoleon Lebulu, an employee at the ministry of culture and an obvious remnant of the 'cursed past')—for this is not the author's aim, hers is to affirm, and not criticize.

Evan Mwangi, while writing about Ogola's first novel, stated that the book contributes to such impressive aims as "liberation of women from pre-colonial misogyny", "emancipation of women from traditional patriarchal control", "hybridity across ethnic lines", to ensure that "de-essentialisation of ethnic origins becomes an inevitability in post-colonial Kenya", "to criticise antiquated traditional attitudes", "to deflate patriarchy and cultural purism" (Evan Mwangi 45–50). I dare state that in

her second novel Ogola continued to pursue these tasks, but chose for that a new method—to draw an ideal picture of her country (it is tempting to call it an utopia, and I will address it in the concluding part of the study), 'Kenya as it should be', the ideal state created by an ideal leader, the first female President. Paraphrasing the title of Ogola's first, and most famous book, the figure of the female head of state serves in her second novel as a source from which a new river starts to flow—the river of life free of the flaws of previous regimes, the life where interests of everyone will be acknowledged and provided for.

Monica Genya: Visions of future against detective background

Another example of the vision of a brighter future is given by Monica Genya, a writer representing the younger generation of female authors in Kenya. Her novel *Links of a Chain* (1996), apart from being a well-written and captivating detective story, is also a hymn to the modern, empowered and, most importantly, socially committed woman. In the story there are at least two role-model female characters, the first being Susan Juma, a brave police detective who successfully fights an international gang of political terrorists. But even Susan Juma herself, when her workmate and suitor Chain asks her about her own role-model figure, confesses to him: "My hero is a small, doll-like woman called Janet Musyoka. If ever there was a brave, intelligent and really perfect human being, it is her and I mean that" (Genya 237).

Indeed, the character of Janet Musyoka, the first female Vice-President of Kenya, represents all the enviable qualities which, according to the author, a modern African women should possess, starting from the fact that she was able to raise herself to the highest post from the lowest of the lowest:

She was born in one of the filthy shanty villages on the outskirts of Nairobi. Her mother had no idea who her father was; it could have been one of several men who were her customers. Janet's mother was a prostitute.

Being a call-girl, however, did not mean that she did not possess no brains at all. She had cornered one of the wealthiest of her regular customers and convinced him that the child was his. He was a political figure of some importance and couldn't afford the risk of scandal. As docile as a lamb, he had paid out huge amounts of money as child support year after year. Janet went to the best of schools, and her mother managed to rent a hairdresser and set about planning her daughter's future [...].

Janet had gone to college in the United States and had got degree in literature. She had started a small women's magazine on her return home. Gibson [her husband] had left Kenya Airways and started a highly successful charter business. From being comfortably well-off, they had become very rich. But this hadn't changed their view of life

After that she had wanted to immerse herself completely in something, in order to leave a mark; something worthwhile. She had chosen politics as it was very interesting, and she genuinely felt that she might be able to make Kenya a better place to live in" (Genya 84–86).

Her career, however, does not completely protect Janet from life's calamities—her beloved husband Gibson Musyoka, a pilot, dies in a plane crash in Uganda, and after twenty years of happy marriage she is left a widow with two children. Moreover, already in her capacity of the vice-president she has to face a terrorist gang threatening to ruin her beloved country by dividing it into several vassal states—and they plan to murder Janet as the most serious obstacle for their plans. The murder, to be executed by a ruthless gunman known under the nicknames of King Arthur and Professor, is planned on the day when Janet Musyoka is to make a speech at the Parliament. However, even in the most dangerous turn of events Janet does not lose her spirit, as is shown in the final paragraphs of the novel:

At that moment, the Vice-President's motorcade entered the Parliament grounds [...]. The cars stopped and the doors opened. Both Chain and Susan gave an almost simultaneous groan of anguish and each of them sprinted off. They both saw the middle-aged man remove a gun fitted with a silencer from his coat pocket, as if in slow motion [...] Susan appeared from the blues, and launched herself at Vice-President, toppling them both to the ground. Immediately, a bullet smashed into the car door, the space which they had barely vacated. The second bullet smashed the car window above them, shattering it into tiny pieces, and the third one hit a secret serviceman who had started running towards Janet and Susan. The latter rolled sideways with the Vice-President in her arms, shielding her with her body [...]

[The killer] hadn't taken two steps when CID agents and secret servicemen opened fire on him. He felt the bullets smash into his body as pain tore through him. Then, King Arthur crumpled slowly to the ground.

CID agents hurriedly helped Susan, Janet and Chain to their feet. Chain went over to gather Susan in his arms while Janet was immediately surrounded by secret servicemen.

Chain and Susan watched the blood oozing out of the Professor's body, taking with it the last threat to the nation. Kenya was safe again.

In the distance, Vice-President Janet Musyoka hurried into the Parliament building. It was budget day and there was a speech to be read. (Genya 291–92)

Apparently, Janet Musyoka does become the hero of even such an invincible female super-agent as Susan Juma not only—and not mainly—because of her outstanding personal qualities (which Susan abundantly possesses herself), but because for her, as well as many of her compatriots, she becomes a symbol of brighter future—where

previous heads of state failed, she promises to win. Not being threatened by a mortal danger to her life, she, supposedly, will not be threatened by the trials and snares of high politics—and this politics apparently should be orientated towards all social circles, since Janet Musyoka knows the life of the poor as well as that of elite. Since she is a woman who managed to make herself, thus there appears a promise that she would be able to make it for her country.

'Alternative' future with a woman leader: An utopia or a motivation?

In her article on ideological aspects of thrillers by African writers, discussing Monica Genya's novel, Karola Hoffman (197) argues:

One aspect that makes this novel an instrument of propaganda is the absence of social problems. Kenya is presented as prosperous and modern. [...] This prosperity is a symbol for a content nation. [...] Nobody in Kenya has to suffer from hunger or illiteracy, and Genya postulates that this state of affairs is guaranteed and protected by the government. [...] With the story around Susan Juma we have, therefore, got a very clear plea for patriotism and nationalism. [...] The representation of the nation is ideologically biased. In Genya's case this takes the form of a trivial utopia that ignores social reality.

It looks like this characteristic of Genya's novel is well applicable to other texts under discussion. Indeed, Ogola draws equally serene picture of her country under the rule of her Excellency, and in the final chapters of Njau's novel it also appears that the ideal community created by women in the forest will, after the fall of evil forces, become a model for the entire country. The question, therefore, emerges—was the creation of 'trivial utopia' the sole purpose of the three women writers?

Of course, the countries drawn in the three texts bear certain traits that can hardly be found in the present-day reality of Kenya or African continent—such as, the stressed equality of gender and age, absence of inter-ethnic or inter-racial problems; other social ailments, such as poverty, are not mentioned, but it is implied that they have equally subdued. However, at least two texts discussed in the study—the novels by Ogola and Genya—give their readers, in my view, a very clear impression that these traits are achievable and possible with a proper commitment and, most importantly, under the proper leadership, the latter being embodied in the novels by the figure of female leader of the nation. In Njau's novel the vision of the future is more abstract and fantastic—but it appears to give the readers the same idea: life of the people can be changed through commitment, joint effort and proper (yes, female) leadership. Therefore, in my opinion, the authors were driven not by the desire of writing a social fantasy—but rather, it was exactly that "call for patriotism and nationalism", mentioned by Hoffmann, that urged the authors to create not just

utopias, but also possible models for better future, which, according to them, is achievable and feasible.

In the above-mentioned study Susan Andrade (39), characterizing the manifestation of political commitment in the female writing from the former Third World, asserts: “Novels written by women from the Global South often do have allegories within them, but they are usually subtle (or not immediately visible) and require an act of strong reading to discern them.” This subtlety of allegories—and I would remind that the scholar refers to ‘national allegory’, i.e. the allegorical representation of the nation in the women-authored fiction—is mostly expressed through the fact that “women represent the nation in relation to the family”, but “as time progressed, African women began to represent the nation squarely and explicitly, in tandem with gender and the family’ (Andrade 206–07). This metamorphosis, concisely formulated by Andrade, has acquired, in my view, a very vivid illustration in the above-discussed novels by Kenyan women writers.

The “subtle” form of national allegory, related to family and the “domestic tale of women’s emancipation from local patriarchy” (Andrade 205) has also been quite characteristic for earlier works by Kenyan women writers, from social novels of Grace Ogot and Muthoni Likimani to *Bildungsromanen* of Miriam Were. In their texts, the women characters struggle exactly against ‘local patriarchies’ in their various manifestations—from traditional to colonial and post-colonial—and acquire empowerment through achieving, among other things, relative equality with their male counterparts, implicitly manifesting the growth of the nation. One of the most illustrative attempts to turn the female character into a symbolic figure representing the nation was made by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye in her nation-wide classic *Coming to Birth* (1986). The main character, a naive village girl Pauline, relocated to colonial Nairobi through arranged marriage and thus becoming a captive of a ‘local patriarchy’, matures together with the young Kenyan nation, acquiring economic independence, self-reliance and self-assurance, but in the long run finding happiness again solely on the family level—however, this time in a marriage based on mutual affection and respect. This allegorical figure was elevated onto a new level by Asenath Odaga in her novel *Endless Road* (1997), in which the heroine Salmari already “represents the nation” in political field. She and her husband Dino are heading two rivaling political parties, and the local elections are won by Salmari, whose program is much more attractive and sensible than her husband’s. In fact, the character of Salmari stands very close to the heroines of the novels discussed in this study. For Kenya of 1990s a woman beating a male (and moreover, her own husband) on the political arena also represented a somewhat utopian ideal. The national allegory presented in Odaga’s novel completely lacks ‘subtlety’ mentioned by Andrade; her heroine certainly does “represent the nation squarely and explicitly”—for she is the very embodiment of the new nation, where gender and other barriers are lifted in favour of public benefit—

and she also does that “in tandem with gender”, or, rather, the gender aspect is boosted up. The family aspect in Odaga’s novel is sacrificed for the sake of social-political advancement, although the husband tries to reconcile with Salmari in the novel’s final chapters, it is unclear whether a victorious female politician will accept his humble attempts to drag her back into the familial milieu.

In view of the above, I would state that in the novels discussed in this study the woman character epitomizing the nation (moreover, the new emerging nation) not in relation to the family but “squarely and explicitly” in social-political sphere has been driven to an unheard-of height, representing an allegory of alternative future of the nation with its alternative leader. According to Andrade (205), “public politics are more visible and valued than domestic politics” and “it engages the national allegory more openly”, and it seems that these two factors strongly inform the authors’ task of creating a female public political figure as an allegory of the new Kenyan nation. For the same reason the familial sphere in the construction of these characters is either denied openly (Tesa sacrifices her family life for the sake of becoming a community leader), is not mentioned (in Ogola’s novel) or is put into a secondary position to the political career (as does Janet Musyoka in Genya’s book).

Of course, this allegory may be deemed as utopian, first of all because, in spite of all the advancements in gender-related affairs, a prototype figure of a female President can still hardly be found in present-day political reality of Kenya.¹ However, as I argued above, the task of the discussed authors was not to construct ‘a trivial utopia’, but rather a positive and motivating model for better future.

Conclusion

In this study I discussed three novels by Kenyan women authors, brought together with a common idea: to visualize a future that would be alternative to those gloomy apocalyptic pictures drawn in many a recent African novel. This idea of a better future, provided (or symbolized) by a female protagonist, is presented in different ways. While Rebecca Njau narrates a parable-like story of an imaginary ideal community, Monica Genya in her earlier published novel gives a ‘full-fledged’ biography of the President character Janet Musyoka, tracing her way up from a daughter of Nairobi call-girl to the highest political circles in the country; whereas Margaret Ogola in her book paints a laconic but expressive psychological portrait of a lady who managed at last to occupy the presidential seat (“tough and fearless woman known to face down armed policemen”). The last two writers highlight two primary aspects of a presidential career for a Kenyan woman—the possibility to rise ‘from the dirt’ and the principal qualities that are necessary for a woman to become the head of Kenyan state.

Marie Kruger in her study on East African women’s literature states: “Even as Kenyan [...] writers condemn the failure and corruption of the state, they continue to

search for a government and citizens who responsibly negotiate rights and obligations" (12), and generally "East African women writers [...] remain committed however, to the promise of social mobility and democratic participation, and of economic prosperity and cultural autonomy" (16). She concludes: "the discussion of rights and responsibilities, and the concern with human dignity and duties, is central to the narratives of East African women writers" (211), and the figure of a female President appears as the topmost embodiment of these searches, commitments and concerns. Political and social empowerment of women as the founding trait of the country's future is advocated in the novels by other women writers, such as Asenath Odaga, Patricia Ngurukie, Florence Mbaya and some others, thus turning Kenyan women writers' vision of the future into a positive alternative to apocalyptic pictures frequently seen in 'male' literary works; according to these writers, such a future is possible only in case the ideas of equality and equity permeate the social fabric on all levels and in all aspects, and women are recognized as the legitimate and potent power—the way they are portrayed in the works by Kenyan women authors.

Notes

1. The idea of female presidency, on the one hand, seems to have already grown certain roots in present-day Kenyan political reality—during the two recent presidential elections female names appeared in the list of candidates; generally, the participation of Kenyan women in the country's politics has considerably increased in the first decades of this century. On the other hand, there is a strong 'counter-current', supported even by the government institutions, that undermines female rights—suffice it to recall the polygamy legalization bill, recently passed by Kenyan Parliament.

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