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Visions of the future in the 'new' Swahili novel: Hope in desperation?

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The 'new' novel in Swahili, the most significant phenomenon in Swahili literature in the recent decades, has dealt with the questions of the future of the African continent and the world as one of its central themes. Kenyan and Tanzanian authors, whose novels are analysed in the article, present in their works a rather gloomy, apocalyptic-type visions of the future of humanity—but at the same time, leave the readers with hope that the catastrophic situations described in their books may be prevented or solved by joint effort of all the people of Africa joined into one nation. **Keywords:** Apocalyptic vision, East African writing, the 'new' novel, Swahili literature.

The so-called 'new', or 'experimental' novel¹ in Swahili emerged in the early 1990s with the publication of its founding text, the dilogy *Nagona* and *Mzingile* by Euphrase Kezilahabi. Since the very time of its appearance, the 'new' novel declared a conscious formal and thematic split with the previous tradition of novel writing in Swahili. The novels by Tanzanian and Kenyan authors written in 1970s—1980s mainly were of realistic social-critical type and were dealing solely with local problems of these countries. The 'new' novels in their formal and stylistic aspects are marked by tangible links with post-modern writing (see, e.g., Gromov, "Postmodernistic Elements in Recent Swahili Novels") and such forms as parabolic and allegorical prose. In terms of contents, the main concern of the authors appears to be not only the local developments in East African region, but also their fear for the future of Africa in particular and the human race in general. According to 'new' Swahili novelists, the very existence of both is seriously threatened by three enemies—globalization (*utandawazi*), imperialist ambitions (*ubeberu*) and individualism (*ubinafsi*), that are gradually destroying three foundations of humanity—humaneness, love and essence (*utu, mapenzi na kiini*).

In this view, many Swahili writers depict in their works apocalyptic and dystopian pictures of the future—the world before and after the global catastrophe, dominated by dictatorial powers, struck by hunger and drowning in the abyss of ecological and economic hardships. However, in their works these authors also give their own considerations about the possibility of saving the human world, thus giving the

readers a serious warning for the future and at the same time leaving them with a hope for it. These common concerns stipulate the appearance in their works of common motifs and other aspects, which commonality, in fact, served as the criterion for the selection of texts for his study.

It should also be noted that 'new' Swahili novel reveals rather scarce links with the classical dystopian texts of Western writing; it seems that one would hardly find Orwell's warring continents, Huxley's brave new world or Zamyatin's unified state in Swahili dystopias. In other words, Swahili writers create their own 'anti-worlds', mostly using the indigenous material—in terms of characters, situations, motifs et cetera.

It must also be reminded that although the 'new novel' appears to be the most remarkable phenomenon in recent Swahili literature, the trend itself is comprised of several texts and rather few authors. Each of these authors (with an exception of Tom Olali), along with their achievements in the field of the 'new' novel writing, have established a commendable reputation in Swahili literature by producing numerous prosaic, dramatic and poetic works.

The main tasks of this study, in view of the above, are two. Task one is to outline the vision of the future, developed by 'new' Swahili novel, using as an example selected texts from Tanzania and Kenya. Task two is to highlight those solutions that the authors suggest to the apocalyptic situations described in their texts.

The texts outlined below, authored by several authors from Kenya and Tanzania (we group these authors here only by 'territorial' criterion, also taking into account the fact that 'new' novel in Kenya appeared later than in Tanzania), were selected, as mentioned above, on the ground of commonality found in the authors' approaches to the description of the future calamities of mankind and the possible ways out of this dead-end situation, as well as in the choice of the principal agents of action, construction of space and several other aspects of the text. In this study, we deliberately exclude the analysis of various stylistic elements of the texts—such as the treatment of the fantastic, narrative voice and focalization, etc.—for in our view, important as they are, they are not directly related to the immediate topic of this study. It also might have made more sense to group the discussed texts according to the above-mentioned aspects; however, we thought that outlining them individually will enable the reader to get a picture of each writer and his texts.

Tanzania

Euphrase Kezilahabi

Kezilahabi's works *Nagona* (a name, also may be translated as "I dream", 1990) and *Mzingile* ("Labyrinth", 1991), named by various critics as founding texts of the 'new' Swahili novels (we call them texts, since the generic belonging of these works is still

debated by the critics—see, e.g., Gromov, “*Nagona* and *Mzingile*—Novel, Tale, or Parable?”; Wamitila “*Contemptus Mundi* and *Carpe Diem* Motifs in Kezilahabi’s Works”; Bertoncini, “Topical Trends in Swahili Literature.”), present a dystopian—namely, catastrophic—vision of the humankind’s future.² According to the author, in the future the human world is subject to several catastrophes.

The first one may be deemed as the catastrophe of the human society, after it, the human race, allegorically depicted as the town where the main character (referred to as just ‘*mimi*’ – ‘I’) comes, decides to reject thinking, throws away all the books, kills librarians and writers, and drags a miserable life in dilapidating houses, feeding themselves from the ‘well of dreams’.

However, even these miserable remnants of human race are to perish in the second, more symbolic (but arguably more drastic) catastrophe of human knowledge, allegorically shown as the day of *Ngoma Kuu* (Great Dance) or *Ungamo Kuu* (Great Confession). Both names are, in fact, quite applicable for on that day, a certain *Kizee mwenye fimbo* (An Old Man with a Stick, as may be assumed, the Supreme Being) summons to a ceremonial dance groups of dancers, each being headed by a prominent figure in the history of human knowledge—from Aristotle and Freud to Karl Marx. The dance, however, turns into a wild orgy, which grows into the world collapse.

After the Great Dance very few people manage to stay alive, among them *mimi*, who is now bound to take care of a little girl, born on the day of *Ngoma Kuu*. This girl was supposed to be the long-awaited Second Saviour, but all her attempts to save the humankind, already revived, go in vain—she is killed, as her predecessor, and *mimi*, is now supposed to find God, her father, and to bring him to his daughter’s funeral. The hero finds God—the same *Kizee mwenye fimbo*—as a very weak old man, preparing to die. He refuses to leave his hut on the mountain, so the hero returns alone to the human world.

On his return, he discovers that during his absence several centuries have passed, the power on Earth had been taken by a certain totalitarian government, which once again drove the world to the catastrophe, this time nuclear one. The main character, *mimi*, decides to settle down among the ruins of his native village, and, to his surprise, finds in his demolished home the same *Kizee*, God Almighty—his hut on the mountain had also been burned—so he descended to die among the remnants of the human world.

The hero feeds him and treats him in every way; one day strong rain falls, the nature, nearly finished by the war, starts to revive, and the hero meets a magic girl, whom he marries (throughout the dilogy she is also featured as a supernatural creature called *Nagona*), and it appears that they are bound to become Adam and Eve of the new and better mankind. In the final scene of the book the God climbs back to his mountain, it may be supposed that the world will start anew.

Said Ahmed Mohamed

In two texts by Said Ahmed Mohamed, that are deemed as belonging to the realm of the 'new' novel—namely *Babu Alipofufuka* ("When Grandfather Came Back to Life", 2001) and *Dunia Yao* ("Their World", 2006)—the image of the future is not so different from the one drawn by Kezilahabi. In *Babu Alipofufuka* the main character K, a well-off African businessman and an unscrupulous politician, encounters with his grandfather, who raises from the dead in order to teach K and his generation about proper way of living. For that purpose, he takes K into a different world, "a world in which you live but which you do not see" (81), where he leads him through several locations, each symbolically representing the pitiful present-day state of mankind—a stony desert with snakes (environment being destroyed by humans),³ market where sellers have plenty of goods, but the buyers cannot afford them (symbol of today's Africa), K's native village in a state of poverty (gap between the rich and the poor), and others.

Closer to the end of the journey K, because of his numerous misdeeds against his own people, is given into the hands of the Judges of Time (*Mahakimuwakati*), who, before giving K his sentence, move him in time to the near future—the Africa of 2089, where the sun "shines million times hotter than in 1940, when he was born [...] It was clear that even the light rains have not fallen for years". All the natural resources are exhausted, in the half-destroyed villages, towns and cities there are no roads, neither transport. People plodding along look old and exhausted; all the young and healthy ones fled to rich countries to "sell their muscles for a new slavery". Remaining people are completely desperate and walk without any aim; no one cares the slightest about the poor; even the beggars are not given alms; there are no schools, no hospitals; nothing to sell nor to buy. Cattle in the pastures and fish in the rivers are dead. People, clad in rags, live by only one principle—"give way to the strong" (*mwenye nguvu mpishe*); they have even lost the ability to feel pain or hunger and they do not remember anything but false promises of a better life that they were given before; their only hope is the looming end of the world and their misery.

After showing him such a frightening picture of the near future, the judges put K back to his world. But K has changed—he is now propagating a new ideology, according to which one can commit suicide and then get back to a new life; he himself sets the first example, by hanging himself on the tree growing on his grandfather's grave. However, after his death he starts to appear as a ghost in different places, teaching a new ideology—"how one can kill himself or herself and then bring himself or herself back to life. It is predicted that people will listen to him more and more, for at that time people will admire a new trend—a trend in which one can kill himself or herself and then revive himself or herself. There will be those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the whole country; for the sake of future generations." (translated by K. W. Wamitila, see Bertoncini et al. 198). Therefore, as Karani Kakai puts it, although eventually K. ends up badly, there is a glimpse of hope

that Africa may one day take control of its destiny and its rightful place in world history (Kakai 1).

In *Dunia Yao* ("Their World", 2006), Said Ahmed Mohamed tells the story of Ndi, a former government official in, presumably, Tanzania (namely Pemba) of the near future, who eventually, because of the disappointment of the practices and current state of "their world", secludes himself in his house and is slowly losing his mind—until in his visions (or is it reality?) he, an aspiring writer, meets a magical helpmate, Bi Muze—Lady Muse, a Greek goddess of art.

With the help of Muse Ndi travels (in his dreams or 'fantastic reality'—this question is left open) to various worlds; in several trips she shows him the images of the hostile world of today, the world of "total hybridity" (65), where "postmodernism met globalization" (171), majority of the population is rolling in poverty, few ones are enjoying luxury, closing their eyes to the needs of the world outside. The Muse comments that this may remain forever, for "their world knows neither before nor after"—thus implying the vision of the catastrophic future of mankind.

Later Muse takes Ndi to an event (resembling the Great dance in Kezilahabi's *Nagona*) where Africa is represented as a parade of various historical persons who ever influenced the continent's past and the present: Mao, Lenin, Gandhi, Churchill, Pope, American presidents, Arab traders, etc. (chapter 14). From this event Ndi, after cleansing ceremony, joins the ranks of those who are likely to build a new Africa. Ndi already had a vision of the same type. In chapter 8 Muse takes him to a haven, where he sees a crowd of people of different ages, genders and origins—"Swahilis, Africans, Comorians, Indians, Arabs, Beludgis, Shirazis"—dancing a traditional women's dance; the Muse tells him that these people are to restore the lost connection between the humans and the natural power of the earth (100). In chapter 16, Ndi participates in an event where crowds of Africans, standing around a group of three rocks (three hearthstones—symbol of Africa's continuity) among the decaying machines and rotten poisonous medicines (perishing technocratic civilization) are listening to a mysterious giant, who, calling himself with the names of Yoruba gods, explains that he was send by the Creator (who Himself is presents at the ceremony in the form of two hands protruding from the sky). He calls upon the Africans to stop being ashamed of their origins and their past (for other peoples of the earth are proud of both); reminds them of their heroes (calling the names of the prominent figures in the liberation movement, such as Neto, Cabral, Lumumba and others), and then feeds the crowd with magical drink from the rhino's horn (symbol of unity) and traditional African food that lies on the cloth around the three rocks (Ndi, to his surprise, is fully sated with one single banana). Soon after, Ndi's wife gives birth to a daughter; since no one happens to be around, Ndi himself attends to the delivery; the newborn child is of magic powers—at three months she talks, walks, reads and has an increasingly inquisitive mind.⁴

Kenya

Katama Mkangi

Katama Mkangi (1944–2004) may well be considered as the founder of “new’ novel in Kenya, for his last novel *Walenisi* (translated freely as “They Are Us”, 1993) is also based on the journey to another world and features futuristic visions. As put by K. W. Wamitila, Mkangi’s last work is “a complex science fiction novel in the form of a parable, narrating the story of Dzombo, a young revolutionary who is sentenced to death and forced to board a rocket that is designed to crash. But the protagonist manages to crash-land in a strange country, ‘Walenisi’, which is the very antithesis of his native one. Walenisi used to be governed by a dictator, but has turned into a society characterized by equitable distribution of wealth, respect for women and the rule of law ... Equipped with new knowledge and accompanied by the woman he has married, Mtu Bint Fikirini, Dzombo prepares to return home. His wife is pregnant and this indicates hope for the future.” (Bertoncini et al. 476). In Mkangi’s book the dystopian pictures are encountered in the descriptions of the Dzombo’s native planet and that of Walenisi, when it was under dictatorial rule; that is the negative vision of the future of which Walenisi managed to save myself—and which Dzombo and his people, hopefully, will try to eliminate on their native planet.

Kyallo Wadi Wamitila

The growth of new Swahili novel on Kenyan soil is inseparably connected with the name of Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, a scholar, a publisher and undoubtedly the major figure on present-day Kenyan Swahili writing scene. His two works written in the course of the ‘new’ novel—*Bina-Adamu* (“Wonder-man”, 2002) and *Musaleo* (“Moses of Today”, 2005)—bear a considerable number of inter-textual links with Kezilahabi’s diology (see Wamitila, “Mahojiano Mafupi na Lutz Diegner juu ya Riwaya ya *Bina-Adamu*”, Bertoncini et al. 71). *Bina-Adamu* tells the story of an unnamed (like Kezilahabi’s *mimi*) character, a village boy, searching for three ‘male-female’ kids (*wasichanawavulana, huntha*), the children of the village prophet; if the hero manages to find them, life in his village, which is now one of abject poverty, will change for the better. During his long journey the hero, with the help of various magical assistants (among them a mysterious Voice, belonging, presumably, to the Supreme being, and a beautiful woman named Hanna), visits Europe, which ‘lives in yesterday’, industrial Asia, which ‘lives in hope’, and Africa, which is living ‘on the outskirts of the global village’ and is devastated by famine and wars. Everywhere he goes he comes across irrational and inexplicable deeds committed by a mysterious being known only as P.P.—in Europe P.P. had defeated fascism (but does not touch its modern followers); in Asia he destroyed Hiroshima; Africa he treats in the harshest way—using a stone, he has knocked the brains out of politicians’ heads and now is selling the continent out to foreigners, polluting the oceans with oil and radioactive waste.

By the end of his journey the hero manages to find P. P. in America—Garden of the second Eden (*Bustani ya Eden ya pili*), whose inhabitants, the sharks of global business, live off the poverty of the developing countries, claiming that they ‘live today’ and ‘live in reality’. Under P. P.’s guidance the Americans are creating ‘the man of the future’—the humanlike creature who doesn’t remember his origins or history, who can not think and whose only concern is the consumption of industrial products. P. P. himself turns out to be none other than Peter Pan, ‘a giant with a baby’s face’, ‘a worthy heir to Yanguis, the Kaiser, the Fuehrer, Franco, de Gaulle, Hirohito and Churchill’ (Wamitia, *Bina-Adamu* 152), the pillar of globalization and of the new world economy. The hero is surprised to learn that P. P. committed all his evil deeds merely because he loves to play (as the hero is warned repeatedly about P. P. on his journey, “he refuses to grow up”). Thus the author implies that the imperialistic powers (which are identified quite clearly in the text as the United States, Japan and the European Union) consider the whole world as their playground.

The situation, however, does not scare the hero; he decides to devote his life to struggle against P. P. and for African unity. The Voice agrees with him, stating that “only unity and a new knowledge of yourselves will help you leave the outskirts of the global village” (Wamitia, *Bina-Adamu* 154–55). The Voice adds that “these *huntha* you’ve been looking for are just in your head”, implying that only a new kind of self-awareness will help African people acquire a new and brighter future.⁴

The story told in *Musaleo* is in many ways similar to the one in *Bina-Adamu*; again, the larger part of the text is taken by a quest narrative; again, a hero is a young man, this time with a name Mugogo Wehu, a citizen of an unnamed African country ruled by the tyrannical hand of the mysterious Mzee (“Old man”), the bearer of countless titles, one of which is ‘Moses of today’ (because “he saved his people from the captivity of culture and history”—Wamitila, *Bina-Adamu* 65). From this world, the world of political misrule, police repressions, and shattered economies, the hero is taken to another, transcendent world in a quest to discover the true origins of Mzee. His findings reveal Mzee as a hypocrite, the descendant of colonial yes-men, his power being built on fear and the assistance of his overseas masters; in order to serve these masters, he has denied his kinship to his sister, Mamanchi—‘Mother of the native land’—whose figure represents in the novel the entire African continent. Mugogo’s courage brings to his country the ‘wind of change’ (which has “blown down the Berlin Wall” and “demolished the palaces of many previously famous rulers”—66); Mzee’s rule is over, and he returns to his native village, from which he had been expelled some time in the past, to die.

Tom Olali

The name of Tom Olali is one of the most recent in the field of ‘new’ Swahili novel. His debut book *Mafamba* (“Underhand Doings”, 2008) features a rather innovative

setting—it describes a universe, consisting of several planets, inhabited by various types of human-like creatures, headed by dictators competing for power. The planets form alliances, separate from one another—on the whole, although the action is set up in the year 2500 and its preceding decades, the situation described in the book strikingly resembles the recent events of Kenyan political history. Even in the three main characters of this book—planetary beings named Maotad, Limioe and Amrao—rivaling for power on a seemingly imaginary planet called Nuka (which in fact represents Kenya)—a reader can very easily recognize the three key figures of Kenya's recent political history: Daniel arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga respectively. The course of events described in the novel reflects the happenings on Kenyan political scene within the last two decades, roughly up to the post-election violence of 2008. But although the novel can be qualified as a rather thinly disguised political satire, the above-mentioned dating—the twenty-fifth century—may also be significant; it appears that the author hints at the fact that even in a distant future and on distant planets the descendants of Africans (Kenyans) will retain the vices of present-day situation in the country. Drawing this largely dystopian picture, the author at the same time offers no remedy—the novel ends with a set of rhetorical questions about the nature of political evils and social ills.

Watu wa Gehenna ("People of Gehenna", 2012), the latest novel by Olali and the latest-to-date contribution to the realm of 'new' novel in Swahili, in its 'architectonics' differs from the previous one and bears much closer resemblance to the texts by Olali's peers and predecessors, since its structure is based on the same main elements—the human world (again, the world of the future—the action spans from the year 2045 to 2050) and another world, the Gehenna.

The earthly world of 2040s has practically no difference with that of the second decade of the century. Africa, in the novel shown under the name Kiafra, is suffering from never-ending misuse of power, poverty and exploitation, thus many "Kiafrans" are fleeing to the rich countries like England to be faced there with even harsher exploitation and abuse of rights. On the whole, the world of 2040s is ruled by the devil and his bonnets, who are recruiting from among unscrupulous politicians and other criminals the future population of Gehenna. Apparently, the devil's aim is to increase the amount of evil in the earthly world, with the long-term task of turning the whole of the earth's people into the dwellers of Gehenna. This aim he tries to attain by involving humans into all the possible unlawful and immoral activities; this especially is helped by establishing in the world's countries (especially these of Kiafra) the rule of the devil's accomplices, the worshippers of Satanic Code.

Gehenna, to which the 'converts' are transported, is situated around four big volcanoes, each bearing the name of one of the earth's (and specifically Kiafran) social ailments—Korrapzion (Corruption), Traibbolizim (Tribalism), Landdigrraba (Land-grabbing) and Burnt for rest (this one looks as extinguished, but certain activity is

going on inside). The space around these volcanoes is reserved for those who in the earthly world was engaging in these vices, as well as their victims.

However, the malicious plans of the devil and his henchmen, both earthly and unearthly ones, can be ruined by the unity and courage of the people. This is described in various episodes of the novel, one of the most notable being the chapter about the rebellion in one of Kiafran universities. The students and most of the lecturers, drawn to the end of their tether by the outrage of the university authorities (namely, by their decision to make the studying of the Satanic Code the compulsory part of the curriculum and to transfer instruction into the 'Gehennic' language),⁶ are burning down the offices in the university and the suburbs; to justify their actions, they fluently use such 'devilish' devices as Facebook and Twitter, thus successfully fighting the fiend with its own weapon. Soon, their enthusiasm causes the wave of similar rebellions around Kiafra against the evil rules in many of its countries. According to the author, this "new force of the old united with the young in [...] the fight against evil" (Olali 125) would terminate the expansion of mischief and eventually prevent the transformation of humans into the dwellers of the evil world.

'Their world' versus humaneness

The above outlined texts at a closer look reveal considerable similarities along at least three principal aspects—the vision of the future portrayed by the authors, the kind of solution suggested and the main agent (character) of the text. As we see, the way the authors see the future of Africa and, wider, the Earth is expressed in the image of a society being slowly and painfully killed by various man-made calamities, from the catastrophe of cognition caused by the reluctance of human race to use thinking and knowledge for its salvation and instead raveling in dreams (allegorically representing the escapist mindset of today and its various instruments – from drugs to popular art and media) to ecological and nuclear ones. Before (or even between, as in Kezilahabi's novels) these catastrophes the future is stricken by economic and ecological calamities, social unrest, various kinds of inequality and oppression. This features are mostly characteristic for the present-day situation in the world—and in fact the calamitous future drawn by the writers is a natural continuation of the humankind's present, "their world" that "knows neither before nor after", and the man-made ailments that torture the human race today will grow into the future. The divine forces, that guarded the human race until recently, overwhelmed by the sinful behaviour of the humans, either perish at the mankind's effort, or prefer to withdraw from participation in human affairs. The idea of the catastrophic future may be traced even on the level of 'topography' of their works. This topography appears to be based on three main elements—a human world, a different world (mostly hell-like underworld) and the world of the future—tightly interconnected with one another. This spatial layout

appears to imply the main idea of these authors, namely that the human race is building (or has built) the hell on earth, of which only the apocalyptic future may descend.

All these evils are brought into the world by three factors—globalization (*utandawazi*), imperialist ambitions (*ubeberu*) and individualism (*ubinafsi*)—stimulating one another and inflicted upon the human race by potent powers. These powers are either named openly as in Wamitila's and Mohamed's novels—these are imperialistic forces, the global rulers, who treat the world as their playground, rule it with dictatorial power, live and grow richer at the expense of the less powerful regions, where they are helped by their yes-men (K in Mohamed, Mzee in Wamitila, etc.)—or they are disguised under the 'pseudonyms' of 'they' (Mohamed), forces of Gehenna or hostile planetary creatures (Mkanga, Olali), etc., which pseudonyms only thinly disguise the same agents of imperialism, global and local.

The calamities of the world of today and, more so, the world of the future are revealed in the texts through the figure of the main character, a person on the quest through another world (for reasons varied), and in this quest he gets all the revelations about the gloomy future and possible ways of its prevention. This hero is usually an educated (or at least bright-minded) African (from unnamed characters of Kezilahabi and *Bina-Adamu* to well-described ones in the novels of Mohamed, Mkangi, *Musaleo* and even 'multiple' heroes in the novels of Tom Olali), who through various—and mostly painful—experiences gained during his quest arrives at the idea about the possible way out of the looming dead-end.

The way out appears to lie in solidarity, the joint effort of all Africans, and, on a wider scale, of all human beings, coming together under the motto of unity and equality (or, rather, unity in equality). These common efforts should be applied to many aspects, primary among them being spread of education, knowledge and creativity ('thinking' instead of 'sleeping'), construction instead of consumption, compassion instead of 'man eat man'—but, at the same time (ore even before that), unity, strength and courage will be required for putting down the evil structures; in all this, even assistance from divine/magical powers could be counted on. But even these divine powers, depicted in various shapes in the above-outlined texts (Nagona—Kezilahabi, Judges of time, Muze and Giant representing the Creator—Mohamed, Voice, Hanna and Mamanchi—Wamitila, various 'cosmic' creatures—Tom Olali) may be interpreted as the allegorical representation of three foundations of humanity—humaneness, love and essence (*utu, mapenzi na kiini*)—in their various manifestations (love—Nagona, justice—Judges of time, artistic devotion—Muze, 'parental' care and guidance—Babu, Giant, Voice and Hanna, Mamanchi). These allegorical figures appear to express the authors' idea of the necessity to mobilize the human nature of the humans to pose it against 'their world', which leads the human race to catastrophes and extermination.

Conclusion

The authors of the 'new' novel in Swahili, being concerned with the future of the human race and Africa in particular, present in their works a rather frightening picture of this future, at the same time expressing their own views about the possibility of a more hopeful outcome. Using allegory as their main device, they put these ideas into the heads of their audience; and, apparently they are addressing the 'intellectual elite' of East Africa, those people who in varied ways will be responsible for its future, that future whose frightening visions the writers depict in their works—with the sole purpose to avoid it. By expressing these ideas in their texts in a complex and artistically advanced manner, these writers are also posing an intellectual challenge to their audience, which places the Swahili fiction in Tanzania and Kenya on a higher artistic level compared to present-day state of English-language fiction in both countries. In Tanzania, writing in English is still pretty scarce; modern Kenyan novel in English is much more conventional and has not yet elevated itself to the same level of philosophical concerns and global perspectives (as well as complexity of expressive means), being mostly preoccupied with the local social reality presented in the 'good old' realistic mode. The fact that African language literature has outrun the long-praised local literary tradition in English is notable in itself, but even more so—as, in our opinion, it signals about the growing abilities and place of indigenous writing on the literary map of the continent.

Notes

1. It must be noted that various scholars used different terms for the denotation of this phenomenon, labelling it (very conditionally, as many of them admitted) 'experimental', 'allegorical', 'esoteric', 'polymorphic', etc. (see Diegner; Bertoncini et al. 125). In view of this, I will use the term 'new novel' further in this text purely for the sake of convenience, as being more 'neutral'. The term itself, to my knowledge, appeared in a dictionary of literary terms by Kyallo Wadi Wamitila—see *Kamusi ya Fasihi: Istilahi na Nadharia* 185—as *riwaya mpya*.
2. Philosophical aspects of Kezilahabi's diology, comprising a very wide topic for research, are not discussed in this study; for their detailed discussion, see, e.g., Wamitila, "Nagona and Mzingile: Kezilahabi's Metaphysics".
3. Meanings of the symbols are obtained from personal communication with the author.
4. All translations from Swahili not otherwise noted are mine.
5. It would be too hastened if we assume that in this novel Mohamed indulges in a reshaped 'back-to-the-roots' motto. Rather, he presents an allegorical vision of the possibility and necessity of unity among Africans, and the re-acquisition of their pride as a united nation. This appears as the only way to save them from the present-cum-future where where "you will see men who lost the power of fertility, for cloning is abundant [...] women who give birth in the streets, and children, like buffalo calves in Serengeti, take no time to get on their feet and run" (67–8). This joint future requires youth of new type—thus the allegorical image of Ndi's daughter, a child with unusual flairs; but also conscious and self-based effort of the older people will be needed—thus Ndi himself serves as a midwife at his daughter's birth (the episode may also have a wider meaning—the new and capable generation, that will save the continent, will be brought into this world through the efforts of the old-school intellectuals).
6. *Lugha ya KiGehenna*; not English is meant, for further in the chapter English is referred to by its dictionary name *Kiingereza*; apparently, it is a sort of fictitious code, in which the globalizing anti-human powers are communicating.

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