WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF KEN WALIBORA – VICTIMS OR WINNERS?

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Abstract

Ken Walibora, one of the most known and promising authors in the new generation of Swahili writers in Kenya, may well be considered as a *male-centric* writer, since his novels published from 1996 to 2012 feature men as their main figures. However, in all his books women characters play roles of growing importance not only in the lives of the main personages, but also in the author’s views on the social situations described in his novels. Women in Walibora’s books are almost exclusively portrayed as victims of cruel and unfair patriarchal society – but it is their state of victim that motivates them towards the effort to elevate themselves above their *second rate* condition. In *Siku Njema* (Nice day, 1996) the main character Kongowea is inspired for life by the character of his mother, a famous singer, as well as by his school friend Vumilia, whose human virtues shape his own character when in his journeys after his mother’s untimely death he meets a young girl Amina, driven by social calamities to the state of a prostitute, and later – his dead friend’s bride, who is rejected by the society as a “virgin widow”; these young women nevertheless manage to overcome the ostracism of patriarchal society and build their own lives. In *Ndoto ya Almasi* (Almasi’s dream, 2006) most of the women characters are victims of the social order; however, the hope is vested in main woman character Chebosio, who, being impregnated by her own father-in-law, nevertheless manages to construct a living with the support of her husband. A new type of a woman character is drawn in *Kidagaa kimemwozea* (His small fish has caught a rot, 2012); Imani, a girl of a destitute background, rebels against the current social order, helping her sweetheart Amani to topple the dictatorial regime in an imaginary African country. This close bond between genders (female characters ‘salvaged’ or assisted by the male ones) appears as the author’s vision of the new type of gender relationship, which will help African women in reaching self-empowerment and equity.