



“She Will Never Be a Doormat”: Ideal Female Characters in Margaret Ogola’s Novels

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Introduction

One of the concerns demonstrated explicitly in African women writers literature (which we will define as literature “by women, about women and for women”) is the creation of an ideal female character that may be used as a role model for the current and forthcoming generations of readers. These characters usually serve to embody all those concepts that nurture the feminist orientation of the authors-the ideas of emancipation, empowerment, self-reliance, equality, and personal and social progress.

Women’s literature of Kenya, being founded in the early 1960s, received a strong impetus in the 1980s and 1990s with the appearance of a new generation of Kenyan female writers, whose works turned women’s writing into a strong and rapidly growing trend. The late 1990s and 2000s saw a further growth of women’s writing in Kenya. The ranks of women authors were replenished with new names, among which the leading position will for long be retained by Margaret Ogola (1958-2011), a medical doctor, educationist and the author of several non-fiction works and four novels which made her the most prominent figure in Kenyan women’s literature of recent times. The present article analyses female characters in all four novels of Margaret Ogola, with a task to discern the characters that may be deemed “exemplary”, or ideal. These characters embody the author’s vision of a new Kenyan woman and her role in Kenyan society, and represent the author’s concept of a role model for her fellow female Kenyans.

The River and the Source

The foundations of Ogola’s concept of the new Kenyan woman were laid in her first and most popular novel *The River and the Source* (1994), where she has drawn a gallery of characters that received further development in her subsequent novels. In this book, she leads her female characters to victorious fight against a whole range of problems facing them from times immemorial until nowadays, rooted in the age-old traditions as well as brought by more recent developments. Akoko, the “source” of several generations of women fighters described in the book, started her struggle already in the first decades of the twentieth century, in the cradle of her native community, the Luo of Western Kenya (this community, being also the native one of Margaret Ogola herself, is frequently used as the background in her novels). She struggles with the custom that has always ascribed to women the role of “second class people”, totally subjected to the will of the male members of the community-and Akoko, by her deeds, asserts her right to her own decisions and choices. She independently and confidently behaves at the suiting ceremony (22); after her daughter’s birth takes a “unilateral decision” to name her after her late grandfather (29); does not accept the slightest offense even from the relatives (32-35), and when, after her husband’s demise, the power in the village is usurped by his

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malicious brother, Akoko goes to Kisumu to seek justice from the higher power-“the big white chief”. For Akoko a fair decision of the white DC becomes the major evidence that people cannot be divided into “ours” and “others”, as was dictated by tribal custom for centuries. “Take those white people,” Akoko later tells her daughter, “they are not of my colour, or of my blood, but they are just; but your uncle is ruled by his stomach and directed by his loins” (86). People cannot be judged by skin colour or blood-this truth is further passed down the generations by Akoko’s descendants.

Later, when the demands of customs ostracise her daughter Nyabera, who becomes a young widow without a male child, Akoko not only hails her decision to join a Catholic mission, but she also joins her daughter on their way to a new life. “It is a changing world”, repeats Akoko throughout her life, and this change is accepted by her positively, as the way to emancipation and self-empowerment of women. At the mission Akoko and her daughter, through their devoted effort, not only manage to survive without any male support, but also to raise two children: Nyabera’s daughter Elizabeth and her cousin Peter, who becomes a priest. Akoko keeps saying to her female descendants, “A woman must be intelligent, fast on her feet and hardworking” (112), and these values assist her in breaking the image of a submissive and silent traditional woman. Akoko understands that intelligence is increased by education and not only encourages her children and grandchildren to study, but she also takes a course of Christian education at more than a mature age.

Elizabeth (nee Awiti), Nyabera’s daughter, inspired by the values learned from her mother and grandmother, also takes from them the baton of struggle, for even in Kenya of the 1940s, she has to struggle with age-old prejudices, for instance, against girls’ education. If education was not quite necessary even for boys, it was definitely superfluous for girls. However, for Awiti several factors came together in her favour. The most important was the pioneering and daring spirit of her grandmother and mother. Secondly, she was the future of those two aging women.

Now that her cousin and only close male relative was in the seminary, she was the only connection they had to the continuity of the family [...] She was the centre of their world and nothing was too good for her [...] Therefore, money was found for her education year in year out until she reached the top class at nineteen (120).

So Awiti-Elizabeth not only thwarted the current attitude to the education of a girl child, by finishing the colonial primary school among the best (being the only female student) and joining the teachers training college, but also demonstrated that a girl child may become the pillar upon which the wealth and the future of the family will be built. Elizabeth and her family further support that standpoint when the time for her marriage comes. She gets married by her choice, out of love and, of course, with the benevolent approval of her mother and grandma to young Mark Sigu, who, being a soldier at the “white man’s war” in Burma and a descendant of a prominent Luo family from a nearby village, has through his intelligence and experience also realised that the old world is rapidly changing.

Thus, fascinated by the personality and intelligence of his young bride, he does not retreat to the woman-subjugating attitude of his ancestors, but is rather inspired by the same set of values established by Akoko-he believes in the power of education and advantages of matrimonial parity. Their new type of marriage is expressed symbolically

again by Akoko who, being the senior relative in the family, is to fix the bride price. Mark Sigu's relatives, guided by the custom, expect "some horrific demand for bride price [...] Who ever saw such beauty, such learning?" (138). However, Akoko and her daughter decide differently:

For this jewel there can be no price. Therefore, we have decided to give her to you free except for a token bull, two coats and six goats [...] The bull shall come to *me in lieu of her father*" (139) (my emphasis – AR).

By doing this, and not giving the males the opportunity to have their final say, Akoko demonstrates to the wedding gathering that a young woman is no longer just a source of wealth to her male relatives, and that they will no longer make decisions for her-she is a full-fledged and independent human being, who will build her own life.

Symbolically, Ogola made the night of Elizabeth's wedding the last night of Akoko's earthly life. Akoko's duties in this world are over-she has created a new type and a new generation of women, who, guided by the new values, will blaze the trail for further changes in the life and state of female citizens in the country. Akoko's spirit, however, remains in this world and, as is seen further in the novel, inspires further generations of women in their growing struggle.

Elizabeth and her family successfully adapted to the changes and challenges of post-independence times. While she continued her teaching duties, her husband "joined the correspondence school and worked hard" (162), becoming a manager. Elizabeth gives birth to seven children, two of whom are twin sisters-Veronica and Rebecca. The spirit of equality, equity, love and respect, founded by Akoko, permeates their family life: "There was money, but not too much, and plenty of love-simple and unpretentious". Mark gathered his family protectively under his wing:

[...] He did things for Elizabeth that would never have even crossed the mind of a full blooded African man-with a low opinion of women bred into him [...] Seven children at home and forty children in a classroom are a lot of work; so Mark took to helping her around the house-especially in taking the children off her hands. His friends derided this for a while but when he proved adamant, they gave him up as a lost cause (163).

Brought in this atmosphere, the children, especially the female ones, are to absorb and develop the spirit and values of their courageous great-grandmother and her descendants. The case with the twin sisters, however, proved to be different - from their early childhood they revealed striking difference in characters. Veronica was the perfect embodiment of what her grandmother valued in a woman (moreover, she was baptized symbolically in Akoko's honour, since Veronica was her baptismal name) - intelligent, "a brilliant student and carried off trophy after trophy from school", hardworking and "had a tremendous amount of energy", loving and kind-hearted-"open and friendly and never put anyone down", "ever ready to help and assist" (163). Besides, she almost adored her sister Becky. Contrary to her, Becky, a girl of amazing physical beauty, is rather lazy but tangibly egoistic and cunning – and besides, she does not like her ever-loving sister. This difference in characters soon leads the two sisters into different ways. Vera successfully finishes the university and becomes an engineer. Becky, choosing the profession of an air hostess, soon gets married to a white Canadian pilot John Courtney – a caring and decent person, whom, however, Becky herself sees as only a source of money for meeting her growing desires. John, learning that while he was away on duty, his wife had

numerous affairs, divorces her and returns to Canada. Becky, being left with their two children of mixed descent, continues her carefree and promiscuous way of life, which soon leads to her untimely death of AIDS. The author's message is clear-disrespect and negligence to the values bequeathed by their grandmother leads to abrupt and disastrous end; a woman living as a parasite on her male partner does not fit the world of today. However, after her sister's unexpected demise, Vera's choices also take an unexpected turn – she declines the marriage proposal from her faithful boyfriend Tom and becomes a member of Opus Dei, a catholic order, taking the vow of spinsterhood. Family members respect her choice-but for her mother, who apparently saw in Vera the successor in her grandmother's and her own cause, it was quite a blow.

Still fate (or the Almighty – since Ogola's strong religious sentiments are very evident in all her novels) saves the situation. Vera's place is taken by Wandia, a young medical doctor, the wife of the family's elder son Aoro Sigu, whom she proposed to as he was too shy to take the initiative. Wandia comes from a different community-she is a Kikuyu, whose rivalry with the Luo permeates Kenya's recent history. But it is Wandia, who with her strong personality, intelligence, loving and hardworking nature became a new living embodiment of Akoko's spirit and ideals. The very fact that she is of different ethnicity strengthens Akoko's legacy and the authorial message-people cannot be assessed by their ethnic or racial belonging, but only by their humane principles. Wandia is intelligent, hardworking and makes the most successful career-she is the first woman professor of medicine in Kenya; she is a loving wife, and mother of not only her own three children, but also the adopted kids of the late Becky. She is the darling of the Sigu family, the closest friend of Vera and the beloved daughter of her mother-in-law, with whom "they took to one another immediately".

She [Elizabeth] also remembered clearly the day Akoko had died and her conviction that it was all over. How mistaken she had been! For in truth it had only just begun and now she saw evidence of that great woman in so many of her grandchildren, but strangely enough most clearly in her daughter-in-law Wandia – the girl from the ridge country of the Kikuyu, who was no blood relative but who clearly if instinctively understood the true destiny of a woman – to live life to the full and to fight to the end (286).

The characters briefly described above are bound together by the common set of values founded by Akoko, the "source" in the river of the Sigu family. These values – intelligence and open mind (developed by education), hard work, determination, love and human compassion, and, last but not the least, religious devotion – allowed these women "to live life to the full and to fight to the end", and victoriously at that, with many social vices and injustices, from custom-based objectification and subjugation of women to tribalism and male chauvinism in society. The writer addressed her reading public – primarily, as we assume, targeting its female part – with a clear message on how to change their lives for the better, following the 'recipe' prescribed by ideal characters of the novel.

I Swear by Apollo

The sequel to *The River and the Source*, titled *I Swear by Apollo* and published in 2002, shows the development – both in terms of plot and personalities – of the characters featured in Ogola's first novel. Here we again see a chain of role model personages,

whose success in life is based on the set of values defined in *The River and the Source*. We meet again Wandia and Aoro, aged but even more loving and compassionate to each other, and even more so to their children, biological and adopted. The story of the latter, Alicia and John, the children of Becky, Vera's late sister, lies in the centre of the novel. Both of them are initially suffering from identity crisis, being of mixed black Kenyan-white Canadian origin, they try to fully identify themselves with Kenya, where they live, totally neglecting their Canadian part. In the course of time (and with the help of the people, and primarily their family) they reconcile with their Canadian father and restore the harmony between ethnicities, races and families – Alicia gets married to Brett Stanley, a white Canadian (brother to her father's second wife Cybil), and John marries a Kenyan beauty Kandi Muhambe (the daughter of Vera's rejected boyfriend Tom from *The River and the Source*).

The main female character of the novel is Alicia Sigu Courtney, whose personality further develops the founding values set by her great-great-grandmother Akoko and carried and evolved by other members of the family. She is intelligent and keen on education even though she doesn't study medicine, as her stepmother Wandia did, but music and design at Kenyatta University at post-graduate level. This proves that women can master not only in science, but arts as well! Alicia is hardworking – always the first in school and at the university; she exhibits numerous other merits, such as modesty and dignity; and is ever-loving, forgiving and striving to render every assistance to the people, especially her loved ones. She is the first to rebuild the relations with her long-lost Canadian father – “all she had ever really wanted was to have her daddy with her and therefore as far as she was concerned the past could be erased with that generosity that only women are truly capable of” (105). Her help is also decisive for her brother John to evolve the relations with his biological dad from offense and contempt to forgiveness and compassion; however, her dad's proposal to re-settle in Canada is hardly considered: “I love this country. It is my home and no other place can ever be” (115). This problem is also settled afterwards --Alicia and her brother are happy to be homed by two countries, which is becoming sort of a standard in today's world.

Akoko's spirit is largely instilled in Alicia by her stepmother Wandia –“she had been brought up by a woman of rare excellence who in fact had somehow managed, with the dexterity of a skilful physician [which in fact she was], to heal wounds which otherwise have been mortal” (9). Among other things, Alicia has acquired her stepmother's gift to heal people's wounds-especially the wounds of the soul; the link between the generations of women bearing Akoko's spirit is thus preserved and strengthened. Later, as is hinted, this spirit will find yet another incarnation in Wandia's blood daughter Lisa. Alicia embodies the author's idea of the harmony between peoples, genders and races, the idea started by Akoko and now carried out into a new century and a new millennium – in which, as Ogola was apparently willing, the whole mankind 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) – these words, posed by a new “family matriarch” Wandia, appear to remain urgent in the present-day world.

Although the story of *I Swear by Apollo* was again, as in its prequel, revolving around the Sigu family, a few other personages of lesser prominence appear to contribute considerably to the author's gallery of ideal female characters. Among these is, for example, Kandi, the young wife of Alicia's brother John, who also possesses all the

enviable family values. She is intelligent and hardworking (starting her diplomatic career), confident (in fact, follows the steps of her mother-in-law Wandia by proposing herself to her man), compassionate and loving. Yet another, although very episodic, character of the novel elevates Ogola's gallery of ideal women onto a new level by leading them into state politics, and of the highest level at that, for the novel features – for the first time ever in Kenyan writing the figure of the country's first (although unnamed) female president!

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" (8).

The figure of the female politician, important as it is not only for Ogola as the author, but generally symptomatic in modern Kenyan women's literature (see, e.g., Rinkanya 2014), briefly introduced in *I Swear by Apollo*, gets its further development in Ogola's subsequent works.

Place of Destiny

Ogola's last two novels, although not connected at plot and characters level with the previous two books, support the same standpoint and the system of values that inspired her female characters in the two-volume saga of the Sigu family. *Place of Destiny* (2005) largely features a diary of a woman bravely fighting with a mortal disease (which, sadly, turned out a grim prophecy for the author's life as well). This novel also is founded on the concept of a 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, diligence and determination made her way to school, started her own trade, and slowly made herself 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 mother's virtues. Imani, the elder daughter, receives a degree in education, but rejects an offer to teach at a prestigious school and instead becomes a teacher first in a remote village, then in the Nairobi slums, and later together with her husband founds a slum orphanage, making a change in the life of destitute children.

Her younger sister Malaika is pursuing a degree in architecture, intending to build decent houses for the poor. Thus, one of the topmost merits of these women lies in putting their skills in 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 woman Karimi Inoti, whom she sheltered after Karimi and her little son were kicked out of the house by her husband. Amor employs her and puts her son Micheni through school and university. In the same way

Amor changes the life of Lanoi Sompesha, a girl of humble background (as once Amor herself was), who joins her company after quitting her previous job because of her boss's sexual advances, and becomes Amor's devoted personal assistant and, with Amor's help, gets her second degree and later becomes the director of the subsidiary company.

Exactly in this spirit of serving the others (and now, as seen, far beyond the boundaries of family) the novel presents another (although again, episodic) version of the character of a woman politician. This time it is Malaika, Amor's second daughter, who, initially intending to devote her professional effort to designing affordable and good houses for the poor, soon realizes that her dream of providing everyone with a decent housing would require more than just an architect's effort.

Surely a basic family housing unit consisting of at least a living room, cooking, ablutions and two separate sleeping areas for children and adults should be the norm rather than the rare exception for the lucky few? Shouldn't housing be as high up as health and education in the minds of the planners? How is health possible if one is under-housed or out-rightly un-housed? There are cost effective user friendly materials that can be used to build replicable housing for millions. It is a question of mobilization and political will. It is something I would like to spend my life doing. Good ideas alone never changed the world - political will does. The unfortunate thing is that most politicians have severe myopia, or an outright dearth of ideas. 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).

As once Amor herself confessed, "I'm not raising hot-house plants. My children must take their way from the bottom where other Kenyans are. If they prove tough enough to work their way from there, then they will get my assistance"(66). Of course her children were given a better start than many less lucky ones (in terms of both living standards and parental care) but the values of self-reliance, hard work, education and compassion (which, in short, may be labelled as "Akoko's values") are firmly instilled into them by their mother, herself an example of following these guidelines throughout her short but fruitful life. Her children will carry these orientations throughout their lives as well-but the main hope lies apparently in the daughters (moreover, the son, "little genius" Pala, is still at secondary school). Pala's sister, the third daughter Hawi, is also likely to follow the steps of the family's women: "I highly appreciate my family where even death has not robbed us of the great foundation laid by two very wonderful and devoted parents." (163)

The issue of ethnic intermingling, highlighted in the previous two novels, gets further logical development in *Place of Destiny*. Here it is merely "hushed down", in a sense that the characters' ethnicity is not even mentioned; the readers can only guess that Lanoi Sompesha and her brother Leserian are of Maasai origin; Amor's husband Mwaghera Mrema comes from the Coast, etc. The reason is the obvious fact that characters of different ethnic backgrounds are mixed so tightly in various kinds of relations that ethnic differences, in Ogola's vision, matter no more. The very embodiment of this mixture is the main character herself. Lanoi, when interviewed by Amor, notices that she has a "face whose demeanour defied any ordinary classification of beauty or even of ethnic categorization" (37). After the interview Lanoi, remembering Amor's face with "oval planes of the Lake Nilotic, the beetling brow and long neck of the Highland Nilotic, a straight but prominent nose - probably Lakeside Bantu", concludes that "somewhere

down the line a great mix of bloodlines must have taken place among her ancestors as the peoples of Africa swirled down plains, crossed rivers or scaled mountains - always in search of a better home, safety or pasture” (38).

Ogola's third, and the last but one novel appears to present further evolution of the characters depicted in the trilogy about the Sigu family. Female characters in *Place of Destiny* rely on the same set of “Akoko's values” established in the two previous novels. They achieve everything in their lives through intelligence (inseparable with education), self-reliance and determination, hard work, loyalty to family ties and compassion, but the latter they extend beyond the family scope, putting their virtues to the service of other people on various scales-- from her employees (Amor) to slum children (Imani). Malaika, an aspiring architect and politician, intends to assist her less fortunate compatriots in the whole country. Religion also plays an important part in their personalities. Amor, having earlier in her life, by her confession, “jettisoned my parents' faith”, in her struggle with death finds deep and healing consolation in religion through her talks with Catholic friar Isidore Gaya. The daughters have received a good religious background from their pious father, and Imani is equally influenced by her husband Igana, a medical doctor, whose knowledge of religion is almost encyclopaedic. Malaika, who had grown more neglectful to church life in her student years, during her mother's ailment appeals to God as her last hope to save the life of her mother. In the chapter titled “As the day dies”, the only one narrated by Rev Gaya, he remarks: “Faith is the certitude of things that we cannot see [...] In fact we live our lives supported by many truths we don't even know about” (32). It appears that this invisible support will remain with Amor's children and their loved ones for their lives.

Mandate of the People

Ogola's last novel *Mandate of the People* (2012), published after her untimely death of cancer in 2011, apparently breaks the “family inheritance” pattern that runs through her three previous books. If in the three previous novels “Akoko's values” are passed along the (primarily) maternal line, in her last one the main female character, a talented and successful lawyer Suzanna Talam, simply has no time to bring up even one daughter to a mature age – the novel covers the time span of only three years, contrary to the family saga shape of Ogola's previous books. The novel, still, is a family epic to a certain extent – 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 calls “Kenya's democratic jungle” (9). Seeing the wanton practices of parliamentary elections (an illustrative episode of which – poisoning the voters of the rival candidate with “*changaa*, a local gin, laced with jet fuel and other deadly chemicals”-- is given at the very beginning of the novel), as malign, Adam, a successful businessman, decides to enter the political arena in order to change the vicious circle. His motivation is strong: himself a former street kid, Adam, through determination and hard work, reaches the heights in education and business, and decides to use his righteously acquired riches to bring a change in the life of the poor rural youth. For that purpose, he organizes a highly successful cooperative society for growing organic vegetables and fruits and employs there his former fellow rural and urban indigents. After this, he sees politics as the next major challenge – and decides to become a parliamentary candidate for the remote

provincial town of Migodi in order to bring real improvement in the life of its impoverished and growingly hopeless inhabitants.

It would be tempting to label Adam Leo as the male version of ideal women characters from Ogola's previous novels, had it not been for the fact that the book features an ideal woman character proper – and that is Adam's wife Suzanna (or simply Zanna) Talam, “a modern-day female litigator” (30). Even the description of Zanna, given in the book, suggests an ideal female figure, closely resembling her predecessors from Ogola's novels discussed above:

She had already accepted the fact that men were either intimidated by her appearance, by her intellect or by her financial success. She was very tall, at least six foot two, dark and attractive with the high cheekbones, wide facial planes and full lips of a highland Nilote-a strong and definitive face. She was also a gifted speaker. When she opened her mouth to talk, the words flowed out in a rich alto with such ease and elegance, such confident mastery, that Adam felt that was the voice he would like to hear for the rest of his life (31).

....She had an ageless face and could appear older or younger depending on the situation. She looked older and tougher in court when fighting out a case [...] He realized that here was a woman who would relate to him on her own terms. She would never be a doormat. Not for him, nor for anyone else. She was the child of the universe on her own terms-comfortable with who she was and what she had become (35).

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 for those wrongfully incarcerated, or persons otherwise injured by the rich and mighty who did not want to pay (38).

It appears natural if such a “female Robin Hood” would become the main fighter in the novel, siding with her equally virtuous husband in the campaign and, eventually, taking the lead in overcoming all the traps and snares of “Kenya's democratic jungle”. The novel starts exactly this way; after having, eighteen months after the wedding, their first-born son. Zanna bravely joins her husband in his first meet-the-people tour of Migodi region (which was chosen by Adam also at his wife's advice), gives a strong hand in its successful completion - only to find out that she is pregnant with twins! Thus Zanna vacates the political scene to fulfil another important duty - that of motherhood. She meets the “joys of motherhood” in full - from caesarean section to struggling for her and the twins' life after birth in the intensive care unit. What, then, was the author's purpose of moving this most fitting ideal human figure from the scene of political struggle, which initially she appeared the most fitting for?

It seems that this question can be answered by having a look at other female characters in the novel. Among those, two figures would attract our attention - first, by their close semblance to Ogola's ideal female personages, secondly - by the fact that these two characters are delegated with the task of confronting the sinister practices of “Kenya's democratic jungle”. The first of these two is Bonareri Bikoti, campaigning assistant to Adam. As in the case of Zanna, Bonareri's characterisation in the novel shows her

unmistakable belonging to the ranks of Ogola's ideal characters. She is beautiful, intelligent and determined even though she dropped out of school due to pregnancy to raise the child alone, which was facilitated by her joining Adam's cooperative. She highly values education and combines her work and her mother duties with those of a school student, hoping to "one day study nursing". (87) Furthermore, Bonareri is hardworking and manages to feed herself and her child from her own *shamba*, which also gives her an extra income. She values family and her achievements finally allow her to reconcile with her father, who, "seeing her determination, promised to assist her if she met the grades required" (88).

When on the fateful day of elections the team of Adam's assistants is attacked by the thugs hired by his rival (a perfect product of "Kenya's democratic jungle"), they attempt not only to maim Bonareri, but also to rape her – which they fail, for it is her who manages to save her comrades by calling the villagers to their help. Seriously injured, Bonareri struggles for her life for several days, but due to the compassion and generosity of her comrades (starting from Adam) she overcomes her injuries and re-joins the team.

Jamie (a short name for Jamhuri (Republic), the daughter of Adam's farmer friend Ewalan Ekidor, does not face such dangerous challenges as Bonareri, but nevertheless her role is drastic in Adam's victory. By her portrayal in the novel, she is another "perfect specie" of Ogola's role model women: "tall and beautifully moulded", she is "a perfect athletic machine with the agile sinewy body of the Turkana", a prize-winning sportswoman in football and middle distance running, thus "her dark face and brilliant smile would grace the covers of sports magazines around the world" (188). She has completed her secondary education ("her school fees had partly been paid by a bursary scheme set up by Adam"-188), dreams of further career in sports, and during the elections "became the face of the campaign", being "unafraid of stopping anybody and explaining why Adam was the man Migodi needed":

"Look, he has time for everybody, even a Turkana girl like me. Imagine what he could do if he was in the big house in Nairobi!" She refused to let what had happened to Bonareri get her down. The others gave her the nick name '*Adamu damu*'-that is Adam's supporter to her very blood. Jamie didn't mind at all having a new nick name for a good cause (188-9).

Thus, it appears that by removing Zanna from the scene of political activism the author pursues double purpose-first, to remind her female readers that, social figures as they are, motherhood will always remain among their primal duties; and secondly – to show that the banner of fighting for justice, which was carried by Zanna during her own years of social activism as a lawyer, will be picked from the younger ones, who in their own turn, following the steps of Akoko and her descendants, will shed the fetters of traditional and modern patriarchy and subjugation and put their effort into bringing the change into the life of their compatriots. Notable is the symbolic parallel that Ogola draws between Zanna and Bonareri's struggle for their lives: Zanna as a mother, Bonareri as a political activist. To achieve a happy motherhood, we must struggle for our rights – this slogan, derived from that symbolic comparison, may well be applied to all the works of Ogola, as well as many other women writers in Kenya and the whole of Africa.

“It is a Task for Two”

It would definitely be short-sighted to state that in her novels Ogola advocates some sort of radical female dominance in the world which once the males failed to rule. Her aim, as we stated above, was to advocate parity, equity and harmony-between ethnicities, races, and, primarily, between genders. As the reader would notice, all the ideal female characters in Ogola's novels are accompanied by equally exemplary male parts.

Akoko's life became drastically different after the demise of her beloved husband Owuor Kembo, who really treasured his beautiful and intelligent wife. Maria Nyabera, her daughter, lost a lot of *joie de vivre* after the death of her own male part --humble and kind villager Okumu Angolo. In fact, these two founding members of the strong female line of the Sigu's also received their spouses contrary to the custom: through their own consent; but Ogola, as it appears, strove to demonstrate that in the cradle of custom the dependence of women on men, no matter how virtuous, was unavoidable and it took Akoko and Nyabera the painful trial of losing their beloved spouses to start their new self-reliant life.

Conjugal relations are presented differently in the case of the other above-discussed female characters. This is a full-fledged partnership, based on love, respect and commonality of values. Elizabeth's triumph in life is hardly thinkable without her husband Mark Sigu; Wandia would not acquire a new and loving family without Aoro Sigu, with whom they even share their profession; her stepdaughter Alicia would hardly find happiness without her Canadian husband, professor of linguistics Brett Stanley. Equally compassionate and respectful partnership is shown between Amore Lore and her husband Mwaghera, professor of history; her daughter Imani and her husband Imaga, the physician. In *Mandate of the People*, Zanna Talam, devoting herself to motherhood, passes to her husband the baton of struggle for the interests of the people in the political field.

It appears it is not by chance that Ogola chooses for most of her male characters three professions that, according to her, are the pillars of any conscious society: teacher, priest or medical doctor (especially the latter, taking into account the writer's own profession). It seems to symbolise an important aspect of her message: together with their loved ones (who, as we have seen, have mastered not only these but many other occupations, from science and diplomacy to arts and sports) these men are ordained to teach, console and heal this world, literally, by their professional duties, but even more so on a larger scale and in a deeper sense, by showing that life “is a task for two”, that women and men need each other as partners and comrades, not as masters and slaves. It is also easy to notice that the male partners of Ogola's ideal female characters share the same set of “Akoko's values”, thus incarnating the author's idea of a new type of family as the model for a new Kenyan nation.

Conclusion

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" (45-50). We dare state that in all her subsequent novels Margaret Ogola continued to pursue these tasks, and, moreover, was following the same basic method – to create characters that by their personal traits, their life orientations and their deeds give examples of persons who are capable of fulfilling these tasks in the present and in the future.

Susan Andrade in her seminal study of African women's literature, 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." (39). 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' (206-7). This metamorphosis, concisely but exhaustively formulated by Andrade, has acquired, in our view, a very vivid illustration in the above-discussed novels by Margaret Ogola. New nation, where the social ailments of the past will long be forgotten, and people of different genders, races and ethnicities will build a future for their children. This allegory is explicitly presented in a gallery of role model women characters found in her novels; and this, among other aspects of her work, will remain as one of the major inspirations for her readers and one of the greatest endowments into Kenyan women's writing

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