

Ugandan women's literature : Katharina L. Nambula *published by Dr. Müller, Saarbrücken*

By Eva Winizki, president UECD Switzerland

In her analysis of Ugandan women's literature, **Katharina Nambula**, who wrote her **dissertation** on this subject, noticed that a central theme appears in all the works: 'The women writers are trying to break male dominance and promote pro-women attitudes at all levels of society through the medium of literature'.

Nambula found that the women 'verbalize the problems of society's fragmentation' in order to create awareness. They clarify the social role of women. The focus is on the depiction of women's position in this social rift between tradition and modernity.

The women are trapped in traditional role perceptions and Western influences. They carry the images of European women within them and are thus directed against their tradition.

They strive for a female role that gives women the freedom to develop and thus improves their position in society. It is 'about the individual emancipation of women from their familial and, above all, male-dominated environment'. This also becomes clear in the novel by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi - 'the first woman' - where the protagonist is only admitted to boarding missionary school because her older brother died. She was thus chosen as the next in the sibling hierarchy - a coincidence that she was the oldest girl in the family.

Education is usually seen as a guarantee of success, although the high unemployment rate in Uganda means that women are far from guaranteed a successful career, even after completing vocational training. Women have to fight hard for their place in the world of work. Makumbi says in her interview in the TAZ quoted above 'Every time a woman leaves the house - and sometimes even within the house - she has to fight. '

The social disadvantage for women is also evident in the development of the literary scene. Male-dominated publishing houses in Uganda did not give women much chance of success for their books. Only since women joined forces with the help of a specially founded publishing organization 'femrite' have they been able to improve and increase their own literary production. Only this foundation gave women a voice. Through the 'femrite' association, Ugandan women authors deal intensively with the social conflicts in their country. The publishing house 'Mahiri books', which publishes not only women's literature but literature from East Africa in general, is run by women and is therefore also very promising (see interview by Helena (Kreiansiek)).

In terms of content, says Nambula, women's literature, by which she means novels, is part of the literature of experience and reflects social reality. In contrast to the literary debates of the

1960s, which dealt exclusively with liberation from Western authority and their own Africanization, today's female authors are concerned with the formation of female identity, which is no longer directly linked to the colonial world. The expansion of education has created a social class oriented towards Western ideals that is turning away from the agricultural sector. Of interest to the youngsters are the services and industrial sectors in the big cities, the schools and the healthcare.

In all the novels, life in the city is seen as the only prospect of social advancement. For most Ugandan women writers, the city became the bearer of all hopes of changing the traditional course of life.

At www.uecd.ch, we are proud of our first female student, who is studying agricultural engineering. We discuss traditional forms of cultivation and the agricultural economics with her. We put her in touch with the Swiss NGO BioVision www.biovision.ch/en/

Quote: 'The most important basic requirement for literature is literacy. Mastery of reading and writing spread in Uganda through the missionary schools. Obtaining this education was a rare opportunity, usually only for the sons of village chiefs (or other prominent families). ' Even today, the costs of elementary school - although they are run by the state - are impossible for many farmers to afford. All our female students had to fight for their education.

Quote: 'Ugandan women's literature is in a phase that is closely linked to the changing social order in society. ' We were very pleased when a female student applied to study literature with the motive of becoming a well-known Ugandan writer (see Justin's interview with her professor....). In the 90s, the public discourse on the status of women emerged. The women's movement grew, gender and women's studies were included as academic subjects at Makerere University and a ministry was set up to deal with gender issues. Uganda is the first African country to appoint a woman to the political office of Vice President.

The self-managed publishing house 'femrite' contributed significantly to women having the opportunity to write in an office. Handwritten manuscripts are not accepted by the well-known publishing houses and women often still do not have access to computers. Reading circles and seminars give women the opportunity to acquire more knowledge and to put it into practice in their writing.

I dedicate this book summary to Justine Nassazi, our student of literature.

Eva Winizki
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