

JOHN HABWE'S SAFARI YA LAMU (2011) AS A TRAVELOGUE**Mikhail D.Gromov***United States International University – Africa*

mgromov@usiu.ac.ke

The genre of travelogue may be regarded almost as old as the human civilization. Iain Manley in his survey of the genre (Manley 2011) traces the history of travelogue in the world literature from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (13th-7th centuries BC), Homer's *Odyssey* (8th century BC), accounts of ancient travelers, like the Greeks Arrianus and Pausanius (1-2 centuries), the Chinese Faxian and Xuanzang (5th and 7th centuries), to the medieval texts of the venetian Marco Polo (13th century) and Arabian traveler Ibn Batutta (14th century), Christopher Columbus of Spain (15th century), and Fernão Mendes Pinto of Portugal (16th century AD).

However, the travelogue as a genre of creative writing emerges mostly in the modern period (although remarkable predecessors must definitely be mentioned, like the brilliant *Lusiadas* by Luis de Camões, a part of which contains a poetic account of Vasco da Gama's travels). As put by Manley, in the old world "the writer did not really exist yet. Men wrote and books were transcribed [...], but the market for words was small. It depended on [...] the church and the king, with their loyal scribes [...]. Gutenberg's printing press [...] ate away the institutional monopoly on words, but a class of men called writers did not properly emerge until the first copyright laws were passed in the eighteenth century".

It is through no coincidence that literary travelogue gained popularity in the 18th century, also known as the Age of Enlightenment. Especially conspicuous is the fact that the most acknowledged travelogues of the time were written by such giants of the Enlightenment era as Daniel Defoe (*A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*, 1724-7), and even more so – that Defoe developed the genre by writing one of the first fictional travelogues, two-volume adventures of Robinson Crusoe. The list of glorious names could well be continued – among them Charles de Montesquieu (*Lettres Persanes* - Persian letters, 1721), Laurence Stern (*Sentimental journey through France and Italy*, 1768), Wolfgang Goethe (*Italienische reise* - Italian journey, 1786-88, published in 1817). Other renowned authors include Jean-Baptiste de Boyer (*Lettres juives* - Jewish letters, 1738-42), Charles Dupaty (*Lettres sur L'Italie* - Letters of Italy, 1788), Xavier De Maistre (*Voyage autour de ma chambre* - Voyage around my room, 1794), and some others.

What, then, was special about the travelogues of the Enlightenment age? In the seminal study of the genre, Reuel Wilson (Wilson 1973) characterized these special traits of the eighteenth century travelogue as follows:

"The travel genre, which had become enormously popular in eighteenth century Western Europe, [...] had been adapted by Sterne and others to themes having little relation to a conventional journey. [...] During this period, [...] the travelogue becomes a hybrid genre comprising elements of poetry, prose, and the drama.[...]"

Although the travelogue does permit a mixture of literary genres, it imposes some important technical limitations on the author. The narrative must be in the first person and the material must somehow relate to a journey (which, however, the author is at liberty to define in his own terms). Like the literary diary, the "journey" usually implies an autobiographical account

of the narrator's experiences – the apparently spontaneous record of day-to-day observations and sensations. The narrative's "spontaneity" is, of course, often a purely literary device or convention used to dramatize a fictitious character who recounts a fictitious story that may or may not be based on the author's real experience. The invented travel diary or memoir usually preserves, for the sake of verisimilitude, many autobiographical or descriptive elements proper to the "real" counterpart. This applies even to the most fantastic examples of the genre such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. When used for aesthetic purposes and not solely to transmit information, the travelogue becomes "literary."

Like its distant ancestor, the picaresque novel, the fictional travelogue has no unified plot. Because the narrator must progress from one location to another, any single intrigue involving one set of characters becomes virtually impossible. The action therefore must comprehend a series of episodes or miniature plots. Skillful authors illustrate their ideas on human nature, national temperaments, social injustices, freedom, art, etc., through such apparently unrelated episodes. A travelogue's unity rests not upon dramatically resolving conflicts that occur among the characters, but rather on the author's ability to generalize eloquently and convincingly.

Even at its most subjective and lyrical, the literary travelogue maintains a didactic moralizing tone. Perhaps such didacticism is inevitable since travel, whether real or imagined, provides an almost irresistible opportunity for the traveler to reassess his own society and his own values. Confronted with alien environments, we tend to compare and contrast the strange with the familiar; geographical displacement inspires detachment which in turn leads us to make sweeping value judgments.

Not only does travel stimulate comparisons, but it may also effect changes within an individual. The dramatization of the emotional and intellectual changes experienced by a narrator remains an important function of a literary travelogue. After all, since the Middle Ages the sea or land voyage has been a common allegory for the soul's journey through life, towards ultimate salvation or damnation. The journey then, whether real or allegorical, has traditionally been regarded as a means towards self-improvement a kind of education in itself for the individual. [...]

The local "internal" travelogue, used as a platform for critical observations on the social and political situation, plays a significant role in literature. [...] Viewing one's country as though one were a foreigner can be an effective means of showing readers the defects of their own society. Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* is a celebrated example of a satirical travel diary used for such didactic ends" (Wilson 1973: ix-xii).

From the above description, the basic traits that mark the literary travelogue of the eighteenth century (and largely, we would remark, of subsequent epochs) may be discerned as:

1) The first person narrative – although frequently used as a literary device to recount a fictitious story based or not based on the author's real experience.

2) The story consists of series of episodes or "miniature plots" – but these apparently (or seemingly) unrelated episodes are used by the authors to illustrate their ideas on human nature, national temperaments, social injustices, freedom, art, etc.

3) Thus, literary travelogue stands far from a simple journey account – it provides the author-cum-character (the traveler) with the opportunity to reassess his own society and his own values, gives the platform for critical observations on the social and political situation, which largely explains the travelogues' didactic moralizing tone.

4) Along with travel information and social commentary, the travelogue also reflects emotional and intellectual changes experienced by a narrator.

In African literature, the development of travelogue is associated in the first place with West Africa. As the earliest travel text coming from this region one may remember *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), whose author traces his origins to a village in the Igbo region in present-day southeastern Nigeria. In the first post-colonial decade Bernard Dadie from Cote-D'Ivoire created his trilogy of the journeys of a young African to Paris (*Un Negre à Paris – A negro in Paris*, 1959), New York (*Patron de New-York – Patron of New York*, 1964) and Rome (*La ville où nul ne meurt – The city where nothing dies*, 1968). A decade later Tété-Michel Kpomassie from Togo published *An African in Greenland* (1981). The tradition goes well into the current century – the 2010s saw the publication of *Tour of duty: Journeys around Nigeria* (2010) by Pelu Awofeso, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels through Nigeria* (2012) by Noo Saro-Wiwa and *Blind spot* (2017) by Teju Cole. As for South Africa, the travelogue literature from the region mainly consists of travel sketches written by various farers of the land, almost exclusively of non-African origin.

In Eastern African literature in English (and other European languages) the tradition of writing travelogues appears to be rather humble. One of the earliest texts that bears certain features of a travelogue is *Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin*, published in German in 1886 (and later in English translation as *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess: An Autobiography*), written by Zanzibari princess Salma bint Said, who after being baptized wrote under the name of her German husband as Emily Ruete. Among the recent samples of the genre in East African writing one can arguably mention Binyawanga Wainaina's *One day I will write about this place* (2011).

However, in terms of travelogue writing in the region a different picture is given by the rich tradition of literature in Swahili. Already several centuries ago classical Swahili literature has generated the genre usually referred to as *safari* (the most common translation of the word is 'a journey, a travel'), to a considerable extent based on the traditions of Arabic travel literature. The second edition of the *Outline of Swahili literature* (Bertoncini et al., 2009) lists about a dozen important texts of *safari* genre, written in the 19th and 20th centuries, starting from *Autobiography* (1894) by Amur bin Nasur bin Amir Ilomeir from Zanzibar, which contains the record of his voyage to Europe. The most remarkable is the collection *Safari za Wasuaheli* (Journeys of Swahili people, 1901), which brought together travel texts by several authors who accompanied European travelers and officials in their journeys in Africa and abroad. Mtoro bin Mwenyi Bakari told about his journeys to the people of Doe and Zaramo (*Safari yangu ya Udoe hatta Uzigua na khabari za Wadoe na mila yao*, and *Khabari za inchi ya Wazaramu na dasturi za Wazaramu*). Selemani bin Mwenyi Chande in *Safari yangu ya Barra Afrika* (My journey upcountry in Africa) accounted his journeys in the eastern part of the continent. The most noteworthy author in this volume is Salim bin Abakari with three journey accounts: *Safari yangu ya Nyassa* (My journey to Nyasaland), *Safari yangu ya Ulaya toka Daressalama hatta Berlin* (My journey to Europe, from Dar es Salaam to Berlin), and *Safari yangu ya Russia na ya Sibirien* (My journey to Russia and Siberia). "A more recent travel record is *Safari ya Bukoba* by Pastor Yakobo Lumwe, a journey by train, ship and car undertaken in 1930 from Tanga on the Tanganyikan coast across Kenya and Uganda to Lake Victoria with two European missionaries" (30). Many of these texts, according to the authors of the study, are marked with "vivid, personal writing [...], emphasizing personal feelings and impressions and trying to understand the nature of the people" (27). Most of them have the stylistic traits characteristic for the travelogue genre – they are first person narratives, consisting of multiple (sometimes unrelated) episodes, their

authors can also hardly escape “didactic and moralizing tome”, since they comment abundantly on what they saw and experienced from the viewpoint of the values of their time and society.

What, then, happened to the genre of *safari* in modern Swahili literature? Has it vanished, remained or become developed? To answer this question, after a rather careful perusal of texts produced by modern writers of Swahili expression, our attention was attracted by a book written by the well-known Kenyan author John Habwe, renowned by his literary, as well as scholarly work, the author of several novels and a practicing linguist and teacher. His book *Safari ya Lamu* (A journey to Lamu), published in 2011, on the one hand develops the traditions of safari genre in Swahili literature, and on the other bears the characteristic features of the travelogue of the Enlightenment era – which, in our opinion, is stipulated to a high extent by Habwe’s own inclination towards the literary methods and devices of Enlightenment. In the article *Three novels of John Habwe*, published in one of the previous issues of this Journal (Gromov 2018) we even deemed Habwe’s literary method as “new enlightenment”, stating that, as his European predecessors did, in many of his works Habwe provides the criticism of the powers-that-be, and also shows how human progress is achievable, individually and socially, through empathy, compassion and co-operation between people, based on fundamental and “natural” human rights and freedoms.

Habwe’s novel *Safari ya Lamu*, first, bears the main stylistic features of a travelogue – it is a first person narrative, related by the main character in didactic and moralizing tone, and consisting of separate episodes (or “mini-plots”), brought together by an “umbrella story” of the character’s journey. It is also, apparently, a fictitious story, allegedly loosely based on the author’s experience. Habwe’s novel tells about one month in the life of the main character-cum-narrator, Musa Zebu, the clerk in the customs office in Nairobi, who, being given an unexpected paid leave in December, decides to fulfil the dream of his life – the journey to the island of Lamu. This journey not only acquaints him with the large part of the country that he has never seen before, but also thrusts him into a series of adventures – he falls in love with a beautiful Lamu girl named Maimuna (despite having a fiancée named Maria in Nairobi), who turns out to be a wife of a powerful local sorcerer Mkuki. The love affair leads to Maimuna’s sudden death, Musa’s arrest for the suspicion of it, his release (for he was not found guilty), return to Nairobi, grapple with Mkuki and final reunion with Maria.

Below we will try to trace how Habwe’s text attends to the founding tasks of a travelogue outlined in the above-mentioned study by Reuel Wilson – namely: a) to provide an account of the journey to an unknown land, b) to describe the variety and specificity of the culture(s) in question, c) to use the episodes of the story also to illustrate the authorial ideas on various topics, and finally to reassess his society – in other words, to provide a social commentary; and d) to reflect emotional and intellectual changes experienced by a narrator.

a) Travel journal

The journey itself – its itinerary, its main stopping points, its attractions – is described by the narrator with veritably “classical” thoroughness and scrupulous depiction of even the slightest details. Musa registers all the stages of his travel – starting from the description of the bus, all its passengers and the procedure of the departure from Nairobi. The traveling process itself issues his moralizing comments – he, for example, criticizes Indian music that plays in the bus (not everyone might like it) and, more profoundly, the high speeding of the driver (he endangers the lives of the passengers) (9-11); the latter theme is expanded in his two-page comment and description of the car crash near Manyani (14-15).

No less profound account and comment is given about the main stops of the journey – Mtito Andei (12-13), where the street vendors sold wild honey and woodcarvings, Manyani with one of the country's largest prisons, Voi, where for the first time in his life Musa sees baobab trees (16). The major intermediate stop is Mombasa, where Musa eagerly describes almost everything – hotel room where he stays, hotel restaurant where he eats, the waitress who serves him, clients around him (with a vivid picture of a drunk woman's dance – 20-21), his encounter with Maimuna. Musa registers with surprise the generally shabby looks of the town – he especially notices the messy streets at Mwembe Tayari (46-7), and its contradiction to the praises that the locals raise to Mombasa (the taxi driver tells him that Mombasa's glory lies not in its outlook, but in its culture of doing things unforcedly – “ustaarabu wa kufanya mambo bila fosi”, 47; Maimuna adds that the local food also fascinates people).

Another event – his brief voyage to Mtwapa, where he goes to visit his distant cousin Ali. His lunch at Ali's results in the detailed description of his trip there, the place of Mtwapa, Ali's shop, its customers, street life nearby, Ali's house and its inhabitants (moreover, he issues an internal comment about Ali's marriage – see below). In the following days, Musa (sometimes in Maimuna's company) continues to explore, with the same vigour of the traveler-chronist, other outskirts of Mombasa – Mamba Village, where they watch a local ngoma, Diani, where he is amazed with the number of foreign tourists.

Finally, he boards the bus to Lamu, and the perspective of having his dream come true further fuels his ardour to observe, fix and comment. The reader again gets colourful pictures of stopping points – Kilifi, Malindi (38-9). The overnight stay in Garsen becomes almost a separate story (39-45), with plot and characters – Musa thinks of courting a fellow traveler, a woman who asks to spend the night on a bus for lack of money, but whom he later meets at a local bar (the plan is stopped by the memories of Maimuna); joins the watchers of taarab performance at the hotel; frowns at the local food, muddy water in the tap, dirty sheets in the room, and finally – fights the whole night with bedbugs and mosquitoes.

The journey – its first phase – is not yet over: the morning finds their bus at Lango la Simba – the gateway to Lamu, where Musa is intimidated by the police check and the stories of *mashifta* gangsters (he even regrets for a moment not traveling by aircraft, but then changes his mind – he would not have seen so much then). The end of stage one – disboarding the bus at Mpeketoni, from there they cover their final route to Lamu in small boats (dramatic description again – twelve passengers per boat, many suffering from sea-sickness). Finally, Musa steps on Lamu soil, and takes a (meticulously described) room in Sunrise Hotel, which will remain his headquarters almost down to the end of his stay on the island.

During his stay on Lamu, Musa continues his travels. He visits the neighbouring places and islands – Mokowe, Pate, Manda, providing the reader with detailed accounts of these journeys. He describes the landscapes, people, their activities, even the boats he sails on. He explores other areas of the Lamu island as well – for example, goes to Shela, where they visited Maimuna's parents; here Musa bursts into a colourful description of local food (he does not know how to eat it properly, therefore surreptitiously watches how Maimuna does it). He visits the local museum (and provides two-pages description of the place, exposition and visitors), goes to Sheikh Ali gardens, where he admires the flowers (159). His journey back to Nairobi, however, is barely described – for the reasons that will be accounted below.

b) Cultural report

The ancient and variegated culture of the Lamu island is in itself one of the main themes and even the “main characters” in the novel. The narrator in vibrant and expressive colours paints various aspects of it – from daily practices to peculiarities, from beliefs to ancient traditions.

Musa commences with an excited exclamation – “At last I stepped on the island of Lamu!” (Hatimaye nilikuwa nimekanyaga mguu wangu kisiwani Lamu - 55), and starts with a general description of Lamu town – its streets, houses, pace of life, people of various origins (55-6).

Daily life of the island is registered in all the possible aspects – starting from its most “notorious” attractions, like the population of donkeys (48-9). Musa fully acknowledges the importance of two main “pastimes” – trade and relaxation. He eagerly describes the whole variety of local trading ventures – from a rickety roadside market selling all the imaginable kinds of goods (52) to “Mwarabu’s place”, a big selling joint combining the features of a market and a shopping mall (53-4). He also notices the important role of trading places in the local life of leisure – in the evening time they assume various functions, for example, Bakari’s shop is turned into a club of traditional *bao* players, and Musa is not scrumpy about describing it (85-6). The evening and night hours are generally the most important in the life of the island – Musa is surprised to see that late in the evening the streets are flooded with people, especially young girls wearing *leso*, who are hurrying to attend to various chores (65-6). After several days of careful observation Musa concludes that “Lamu lives at night” (66). Night time can turn even town squares into public leisure places – one evening Musa joins a group of locals at Mwembe Mmoja, where the people are served all kinds of food, participate in all kinds of conversations – from a heated contest of the local tattlers to the demure talk of the elders, from the discussions about marriage to the exchanges about food tastes (57-9).

Musa does not hesitate to register all the events that he deems as worth describing – from the quarrel of two madmen at the market (52-3) to the TV translation of the football match between Ugandan team and Manchester United and the reaction of the spectators in the hotel restaurant (85), and a greedy seller at the photography shop (124). However, the issues related to the local culture arouse his higher interest. He describes with gusto the preparations for wedding that he spots on his way to the hotel (60), and pays heightened attention to performed arts, which Lamu is famous for far outside its boundary.

Taarab performances, as one of the foundations of the culture of the coastal region, are given special attention by Musa. Already on the way to Lamu he is fascinated by *taarab* performers at the hotel in Garsen (41). On Lamu, however, Musa encounters much more high-breed and sophisticated kind of *taarab*. He has a long discussion about it with Maimuna, and the latter advises him to start learning the local Lamu version of Swahili to understand the art better (83). (Generally, Musa’s comments about local Swahili are rather timid – he mentions at one point that his hinterland origin was immediately recognized because of Swahili he spoke - 60; at another, he qualifies the Swahili of an elderly woman in a Lamu street as “kijajemi” – 113).

Culmination of Musa’s appreciation of Lamu performed arts and other cultural activities takes place during the beginning of Lamu festival, which takes almost the entire first half of chapter 16, one of the longest in the book. The chapter starts with the description of donkeys races, with scrupulous listing of the city areas where the races take place. It is followed by the boat races, done on the traditional *dhow* vessels (121). Then the whole “section” on the performed arts follows, starting with *ngoma* dancers (121-2), which is followed by the headliners – New Taarab dance youth group from Pate (123). The second day of the festival features East

African Melody Group (124), the recitations by the distinguished poets Omari Kesho and Yusufu (the latter is Maimuna's father), and another *taarab* group (126). The special character of the day is stressed by the speeches of the elders from Lamu and neighbouring towns (*wazee wa miji*) and the head of the province (*mkuu wa wilaya*), followed by a reception (126).

However, Musa's acquaintance with another part of the local culture, local beliefs, which Musa initially registers out of his natural curiosity, turns out to be not an easy one – especially the belief in sorcery. In fact, he encounters it for the first time when he receives a warning from a female waiter at the hotel in Mombasa about the magical powers of Maimuna's husband Mkuki. Musa takes it rather light-heartedly, even thinking that the waiter has coined the warning out of jealousy. Yet, the following morning, before boarding the bus, he finds at the reception a letter from Mkuki himself – “stop following my wife, or you will not return home” (*ukiendelea na nia hiyo ya kutaka umhodhi, ujue hata Nairobi hutarudi*, 36).

On Lamu, introduction to local beliefs first goes on peacefully, mainly in the form of Maimuna's stories about genies, on which subject she seems to be rather serious – not a surprise, bearing in mind her husband's occupation. She tells Musa about the role these spirits played in her husband's life and practices (Mkuki was once a rich man, but his riches were all used for paying his genies, after which many of them left, and the remaining ones Mkuki sold to new owners), about their characters and behavior (157-8), about the marriages between genies and humans (of which she generally approves), how to tell a genie from a human (76), and how evil genies (mostly in female disguise) can affect the life of humans (giving an example of one of her relatives, 77). Her knowledgeability on the subject even drives Musa to think that Maimuna may be a genie herself. Later Maimuna mentions, that she does not love Mkuki (in fact she was given to him by her father as a payment for his magical services), but cannot leave him, because his sorcery will bring him back (157).

However, things take quite a different turn after Musa's sudden encounter with Mkuki – which happens unexpectedly, when Musa and Maimuna are having a snack at the hotel (96). The men do not talk, but when terrified Maimuna runs away, Mkuki, deliberately ignoring Musa, talks to the local elders sitting at the same café and declares that to preserve the morals, someone should die – and it will be either Maimuna or Musa. The first material warning (allegedly from Mkuki) comes when on his way to the hotel Musa runs into a group of invisible people right next to him – he can hear their steps and voices, but does not see anyone. On top of that, he finds out that he does not remember the way to the hotel; after circling the area for an unspecified while, he bumps into Hadija, the hotel receptionist, who leads him to his room – it turns out that all this time Musa was right next to the hotel building.

Culmination of Musa's encounter with sorcery comes with Maimuna's sudden death. Finding her in the morning dead in their hotel room (and blaming Mkuki for that), Musa calls the police; he is arrested, being suspected of causing her demise, but later released, because the autopsy revealed that she had died of heart deficiency.

However, after return to Nairobi (Musa hardly describes his journey back – he is exhausted and scared) things turn even worse. Already during the first night at home Musa is woken up by the voices of certain invisible people, who are arguing in his room. When Musa tries to leave the house, a man in a shirt appears, pushes him in the chest and says that “we look for compensation” (*tunatafuta ada*). Then they leave; Musa is scared to death, but his househelp Sussy is just surprised – she had not seen anyone. The invisible visitors appear again in a few days, this time Musa is being battered and tortured by them till morning.

Growing desperate, Musa tells the whole story to his faithful friend and workmate Mohamed. Mohamed agrees with Musa's assumption – that the invisible comers are most likely genies or demons (*mashetani*) send to him by Mkuki, and this case could only be settled by another powerful sorcerer from the coast. Musa refuses – from now on he deeply hates any sorcery.

The visits of the demons meanwhile become more and more frightening; one night Musa spots among them Maimuna, who claims “compensation for causing my death” (*ada ya kusababisha kifo changu*, 188) – this terrifies him so that in the morning he is not able to leave the bed. Sussy and Mohamed transfer him to the hospital, but the doctors can not find the reason of his illness and discharge him after a week-long examination. Soon after his return from the hospital the demons come back (strangely, in the ward they did not disturb him). Even Musa's mother comes from the village to attend to her son, but Musa's condition is worsening; after two months, he is almost on the brink of death. In the end, his mother and his friend Mohamed make the decision – Mohamed must go to Lamu, find Mkuki and talk to him.

On his return, Mohamed gives a detailed account of his trip – especially the miserable conditions in which Mkuki leaves, his dilapidating house and ragged clothes (208; at that Mohamed, however, claims that in his presence Mkuki was talking to ogre spirits – *mizimwi*). They agreed that Musa should pay Mkuki a certain amount, and this will settle the conflict (Mkuki's charges are not high – when he reads Mohamed's fortune, at the latter's request, he informs Mohamed that he has enemies, and offers to neutralize him for only 100 shillings for the whole operation). The demanded amount is paid, the demonic visits stop, and Musa's condition slowly returns to normal.

It may be tempting to assume, that by giving this captivating and fast-running story of Musa's conflict with the sorcerer, Habwe was trying to apply a creative method close to “magical realism” – that is, to portray the interference of supernatural powers as part of reality. We, however, suggest that the author's task was, firstly, to portray the beliefs in the sorcery and related supernatural powers as an integral part of the local culture, and secondly – to picture how powerful an influence do these beliefs still hold generally on African mind. Musa, a city-bred educated young African of the twenty-first century, still holds no doubt about the magical powers of his foe – although lamentable living conditions of the latter rather tell the contrary. He readily explains Maimuna's death by Mkuki's revenge (although medical conclusion gives a rather trivial reason), and his stressed imagination starts to create the demons that threaten his life – a well-known phenomenon of self-induced hallucinations (it is notable that the demons do not disturb him in the hospital).

c) Social commentary

Comments on the burning problems of the country of Kenya and its people pervade the text almost through its end. Already in the beginning of the journey, passing Mtito Andei, Musa talks to the bus conductor Kombo about the problems of this region; both agree that government has no money for its development (14). Further on the way Musa notices how the bus drivers and station attendants steal and sell the petrol – which he justifies, saying that it is caused by their life in poverty (15-16).

The problem that causes Musa's heightened attention and very hearty comments is that of education. Himself he sees education as an asset – but for it, he would not have achieved the position that he now has. But he also sees how people with even the highest level of education in

this country are neglected, frustrated and ruined – the closest example is his brother Simba, who, having graduated from Egerton university with – theoretically – the most demanded degree in cattle breeding, nevertheless remains jobless and started even to develop symptoms of insanity (71); the memories of him make Musa think of why his country does not provide employment to everyone (“their occupation is politics instead of economic planning of employment” - yao ni siasa badala ya miango ya kiuchumi ya kazi, 90) and heartily thank the Almighty for having the job of his own. However, the general situation in the country does not encourage the young people to value education; even Musa’s new sweetheart Maimuna decided to leave school after form four and to become a hawker – she did not see how education could help her in life (hakuona elimu nyingi kama hii ingemsaidia vipi). This is also because around them the youngsters see many people who are educated, but leave a miserable life – and on the other hand, those who achieved, as they think, something in life without education. For the latter Musa quotes an example of a local beach boy, which incidentally married a rich Danish woman (146); another example – his own cousin Yankee (known by this nickname), who, despite very poor schooling, is now an underhand tycoon on the coast. Seeing the beach boys in the restaurant, who gather the remnants of the food left by the customers into plastic bags (148), Musa grieves that the government should at least teach these children certain crafts, and then help them with employment – to which Maimuna sarcastically remarks, that it sounds almost as an utopia; even her schooling was paid by a foreign NGO, since her parents were penniless (her father, a renowned poet, nevertheless earned very little through his art, and her mother was feeding the family as a petty fishmonger).

Politics, mainly politics of the state towards its people, becomes another topic for Musa’s concerned commentaries and accounts. The first pretext comes when during their first evening on Lamu they suddenly see groups of American soldiers all over town – they are drunk, bully people, accost women, but nevertheless local girls are competing for their attention. Shocked by all this, Musa inquires with Maimuna – she explains, that these come from the American naval base on Manda. The locals are tired of them – they beat people, rape women, do not pay in bars (wanapiga watu ovyo, wanabaka wanawake, wanakunywa pombe katika baa wasilipe). To Musa’s cynical remark, that they bring them dollars, Maimuna answers, that they earn these dollars too dearly.

The theme receives its development in the evening talk at the Bakari’s shop-cum-café, where the regulars, starting their conversation with a usual bundle of fantastic stories, suddenly change the subject and engage into a lively discussion of local politics. Sometimes their views differ, but they are unanimous on main things. A customer called Barua states that “even Manda now you cannot enter unless you are a Mzungu. It is our country but it is not ours, our island but not ours [...] This island is only for Europeans. Our people were ousted, and Wazungu were brought” (87 - hata Manda hakingiliki mpaka uwe ni Mzungu. Ni nchi yetu lakini si yetu, kisiwa chetu lakini si chetu [...] Hicho kisiwa kipo tu kwa Wazungu. Kimefukuzwa watu wetu kikawekwa Wazungu, - alisema Barua). His neighbour Maridiwa repeats Musa’s earlier comment – we are living on the money that Europeans bring, to which Barua snaps – we should force the Europeans out and live by our effort, and people are ready to do it. The customers talk about unfair distribution and grabbing of land, about pollution of lakes by foreign enterprises. Musa is surprised at the level of their awareness (nilishangaa kiasi cha uelewano wao wa mambo), but concludes that maybe it is because they listen to the radio programs a lot. (It is interesting to note that Maimuna in this case demonstrates remarkable reasonability – when Musa becomes infuriated at the sight of a European tourists family on the beach clad in bikinis (“children must not see their parents naked”), Maimuna notes that foreign tourists still contribute tangibly to the local economy, people and their cultures are different, and everything depends on

the context – “the culture of whites must not necessarily resemble yours... beach has different rules” (ustaarabu wa mzungu si lazima ufanane na wako wewe... *beach* ina sheria tofauti, 143).

The theme of foreign dominance is developed during Musa’s visit to Manda. There he meets a local beach boy named Onyi, who does not go to school, because his mother can not pay for it, and instead guides the visitors. For two hundred shillings he takes Musa to a tour over the island, showing him the rich mansions and explaining that they are owned by Germans and Italians – „here every good thing is theirs” (hapa kila kitu kizuri ni chao), even the formerly public beach has become private, guarded by the dogs, and local people trying to enter it are arrested for trespassing.

Musa’s trip to Manda invites another topic – of labour migration. Onyo tells him that he has not seen his father for ten years – he went to seek employment in Saudi Arabia, and has not been heard of ever since. On Manda he meets another victim of migrant labour – his former school cook Nyawira, who, born in Western Kenya, had to follow her husband to the coast, where he bought a plot of land on Lamu and grows maize; the income is small, and thus Nyawira has to cook at a hotel on Manda (132). Another victim is Hadija, the hotel attendant on Lamu; she was born in Mombasa, tried to get a job in Dubai, where her employers treated her like a slave, and on return to Kenya met Karim, the hotel owner on Lamu, with whom she has an illicit affair as part of her “duties” (91-2). Musa is astonished how people now are moving back and forth (132), but concludes that the main reasons must be political injustice and economic hardships. Another series of comments on these topics emerge in the conversation between Musa and a local trader Ashok, “Indian halfcast” (hafukasti wa Kihindi). Ashok asks Musa about the development on the mainland, to which Musa replies that “politics and development are different things. Also we do not have our own money, we depend on the World bank” (siasa na maendeleo ni mambo tofauti. Pia hatuna pesa sisi wenyewe, tunategemea Benki ya ulimwengu – 100). In his turn Ashok, answering Musa’s question about the development on the island, says that “we have a representative [in the parliament], but he cannot represent us – he is a hypocrite. He brings to us confusion and politics of the mainland” (maslahi yetu hawezi yule mnafiki. Atuletea zogo la mashamba ha siasa ya bara – 101).

Foreign dominance and negligence of the interests of the local people in the region lead to the general decline of mores, which Musa notices in prostitution, also homosexual, nudism, corruption and crime. Ashok, Musa’s new acquaintance, breaks their conversation in a café to talk to a European client, later explaining to Musa that he found a local girl for this mzungu, but it turns out that he needs a boy (which services Ashok does not provide, 103). During Musa’s visit to Lamu museum he observes among the visitors “a muscled hairy European” accompanied by an African boy of high school age; the two are constantly kissing (108). On Shela Musa is shocked to find a nudist beach (109), and during his trip to Manda is faced with unabated corruption – when he approaches a local airfield, he is hassled by a policeman who, demanding that it is not allowed to walk here, starts to threaten him with arrest – in fact, as Musa notes, trying to squeeze money (133); the incident is settled when Musa gives him “a torn 200-shillings note.”

Crime has also risen – one night Musa and Maimuna are woken up by the noise and cries outside the hotel; people from the crowd gathered in the street explain Musa, that a neighbouring shop was burgled at night. “This is Lamu of today,” an elder named Abdirashid remarks bitterly (hii ni Lamu ya leo – alisema mzee mmoja Abdirashid, 137), complaining about the general growth of crime. The topic causes a heated discussion between Maimuna and Musa: she blames it on the “newcomers”, he – on unemployment and poverty.

All the above-listed social ills are flourishing not only by themselves – they are incited by unscrupulous local dealers of underhand economy. Musa gives two portraits of such people: the first one is above-mentioned Ashok, an “Indian half-cast” from Pate; he has a legal clothes shop on Lamu, but is not too squeamish about doing “dirty petty jobs”, like supplying prostitutes to tourists. A much more grim figure is Musa’s own cousin nicknamed Yankee, son to a sister of Musa’s mum, who after parting of his parents left school, then left his family house and became, in Maimuna’s words, “black marketer of drugs and swindles” (mlanguzi wa mihadarati na tapeli, 117); she deems him as a danger to the society. In his record Yankee has several arrests and a prison sentence, but due to his money that he earns through various illegal activities he even served his prison time in comfortable conditions (153). Despite his earnings, he pays his househelp Katana Bonzo, a poor Malindi dweller, two hundred shillings per months. Musa concludes that in the end such people will be punished if not by the law, then by the supreme powers (see also below).

Musa’s musings on social and political topics are summed up in chapter 20 – a short, two-page chapter it fully devoted to social and philosophical comments. Musa recalls Maimuna’s renderings about the luxurious life of local and foreign moneybags on Pate, who build their opulence on the exploitation of lower classes. “It will take Katana Bonzo thirty years to earn one-month salary of the country’s president”, notes he. And again, his hope for the poor lies with the supreme powers: “If anything bad is done to a person, God will avenge him on a judgement day. The world of God has no inequality, it is of justice for everyone” (Itamchukua bwana Katana Bonzo miaka thelathini kupata mshahara wa rais wa nchi wa mwezi mmoja. Kama kuna lolote atakalotendewa na mja lisilo la kisawasawa, Mola atamlipa siku ya kiama. Ulimwengu wa Mungu haukubagua; ni wa haki kwa kila mtu, 178).

d) Spiritual change of the narrator

From the beginning of the book, Musa himself is described as a rather responsible and virtuous person. His responsible and hardworking character earned him a career rise – he started his service at the customs as a junior clerk, but soon was promoted and even given his own office (which he proudly describes on pages 7 and 8). His savings Musa used to pay for his father’s treatment in Kenyatta hospital, and to mark its successful completion he gets an opportunity to fulfill his dream about the travel to Lamu.

However, his life is spoiled due to his own moral negligence. A devout Muslim, Musa does not generally drink alcohol – but on his arrival in Mombasa, deciding to boost himself up a little, unexpectedly drinks six bottles of beer, which drives him to the attractions of Maimuna. On the verge of spending the first night with her, better part of Musa’s nature reminds him about his cousin Petero, who died of AIDS (22); Musa hesitates, but then, driven by alcohol and desire, decides “whatever will be.”

Musa has yet another serious reason for self-reproaching. In Nairobi, he left his faithful bride Maria, winning whose love was really a trial for him – they were school mates, but Maria, being a daughter of an MP, and known under a nickname of “the Queen”, was an unreachable fruit for him, especially when after school she joined the university. One accidental meeting in a café, however, set a positive start (42-3), and after several months of courting Maria succumbed to Musa’s woos. Even the wedding day was already fixed – but the affair with Maimuna puts under threat Musa’s long-cherished marriage plans.

Thus, throughout his journey Musa delves into reflections about marriage. He rushes to the extremes – acknowledging that his passion to Maria is on the wane (he even starts lying to her when she phones him), he starts thinking of marrying Maimuna (although she is already a wife of Mkuki). Then, marriage itself appears to him as a burden – first, when he visits his cousin Ali, who married a woman older than him. Musa is surprised with his cousin’s choice, but then concludes that Shemsa became to him a sort of a mother (29); he himself does not want a marriage of this kind. Soon after that, he decides that marriage is generally not suitable for him, and he would rather remain a bachelor (73). However, several days later he starts contemplating marrying Maimuna again (96), but then a night quarrel between his neighbor Kiboko and his life partner Zuleikha again reverses his view on married life (105); his apprehensions grow when he sees a kind of an omen – on the wall next to a street café, where he snacks, there is a writing saying “a wife is a sharp knife” (*mke ni kisu chenye makali*, 110). Musa’s doubts result in his reflection on a necessity of the official wedlock – why is it not possible for a man and a woman just to live together? (178)

Musa’s difficult state of being torn between his attraction to Maimuna and his feeling of guilt to Maria receives what seems to be a painful solution – Maimuna suddenly dies. However, this does not solve the situation – the newspapers write about the case, quoting all the names, Maria happens to know about the amorous behavior of her sweetheart, and on his return to Nairobi Musa gets a letter from her, informing that he has to look for another bride from now. For Musa this is the final blow, but his attempts to talk Maria back into their relationship go vain. In desperation, Musa sheds tears reading Maria’s old love letters, that he finds in the bookcase, and recalls the words of his late cousin Petero - that women are the source of all evil (185).

Change comes, when Maria, out of her benevolent and humane character, comes to visit Musa in the hospital; to her words of consolation, Musa bursts out crying (Maria again tries to soothe him), and pleads with her to give him a second chance (191). Musa’s feelings of guilt, repentance and also hope are strengthened by the talk with his old and wise mother, in which she enlightens him about the necessity of marriage and the importance of faithfulness (196). Maria comes to visit Musa again at his home, this time with her mother, and Musa, inspired by the support from his own mum, frankly tells the three women everything about his fateful voyage to Lamu. Later weeks, during which Musa’s health is recovering, he spends in deep thoughts – he regrets his previous disorderly life, blames for everything himself only (and not Maimuna or anyone), and regrets about the wrongness of the societal view: “with us a man is assessed by his strength as a lover” (*kwetu mwanamume hupimwa kwa nguvu zake za mapenzi*, 215) – but Musa’s own experience had shown him all the dangers of promiscuous behavior. Finally, Musa’s repentance and sincerity bear their fruits – Maria forgives him, and the wedding takes place successfully. After his full recovery, Musa concludes that the journey to Lamu has taught him a lot of things (219).

Throughout the process of his recovery, physical and spiritual, Musa becomes increasingly conscious about the role played in it by the divine assistance. Religious part of his personality is manifested from the onset of his Lamu adventures. Already in the beginning of the trip, he acknowledges that Lamu is “the summit of Islam” (56), and notices that Islamic religion here is much stronger than on the continent (95-6). This is strengthened in his talks to Maimuna – when he inquired why on Lamu people do not celebrate Christmas, since Jesus is also revered in Islam and the two religions are tightly linked (and also remembering his childhood experiences at home in Mumias), Maimuna answers, that in the eyes of the local Muslims, though they hold Jesus in esteem, Christmas lost its religious meaning and became simply the occasion for partying. “Many things about Christmas I see as purely European [...] All those about the cake and the Christmas tree” (*Mambo mengi ya Krismasi naona ni uzungu tu [...] Zile habari za keki na habari za mti*, 142).

One event that deeply influenced Musa was his accidental (or, as he later acknowledged, God-planned) visit to the sermon of Tanzanian preacher Abdalla, where the latter explained about the vices of the modern impious society (149-50). This moved Musa to think how frequently he himself violated the laws of faith (150); he even thinks of chasing away Maimuna, but understands that it would also be a sin, and deeply repents about his sinful nature. He reflects on fairness and benevolence of God as the last resort for the oppressed, noting that His punishment for the oppressors comes even during this life – his cousin Yankee and his wife, also cruel and unscrupulous woman, are punished with childlessness, despite the tons of money that they spend at world’s best clinics for treatment, whereas their washerwoman, however poor, has four children, who will take care of her for life (177). In fact, after his return to Nairobi God becomes the last resort for Musa himself, – it is Him who he prays to for help, swearing to give up his previous life of debauchery. At the height of his ailment Musa sees a dream – he is about to be swallowed by an ogre, but is saved by the teacher of Quran from primary school. On his awakening Musa regrets that he does not have a religious fervor and piety of his mother, and has not been a good example for other people. This dream has a symbolic meaning – from this time Musa’s recovery starts. Musa’s religious re-awakening appears as the most important part of the spiritual convalescence that he underwent during and after his fateful voyage to Lamu.

In the text above, we tried to demonstrate that an old genre of travelogue not only retains its vitality in the modern times, but also demonstrates remarkable abilities for development. In his book, discussed in this paper, John Habwe not only informs the readers about the issues that he describes through the voice of the narrator, but also provokes their own speculations about these issues. This makes his book not only a captivating cultural and social documentary, but gives its readers a convincing example and method of analyzing various problems of the society and in the long run re-assessing the society itself and their own place in it. On the side of form, in this book Habwe managed to combine the essential features of an “eighteen-century-sampled” travelogue with the old Swahili genre of safari – by choosing the local material (and Lamu as the very cradle of the Swahili culture) and the language and also by keeping that “vivid, personal writing, emphasizing personal feelings and impressions and trying to understand the nature of the people” that characterizes the classical texts of the genre in Swahili literature. By doing this, Habwe appears to create a new artistic form, unique in particular for Swahili literature and in general for East African writing – the form which hopefully will find its further use and development in the future.

Works cited

Bertoncini, Elena et al. (2009). *Outline of Swahili literature*. Leiden-Boston: Brill.

Gromov, Mikhail. (2018) *Three novels of John Habwe: social criticism through “new enlightenment”?* Journal of Language, Technology and Entrepreneurship in Africa 9.1: 90-101.

Habwe, John (2011). *Safari ya Lamu*. Nairobi: Sasa Sema.

Manley, Iain (2001). *On travelogues*. <http://www.oldworldwandering.com/on-the-travelogue/>

Wilson, Reuel (1973). *The Literary Travelogue*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.