

Writing alternative womanhood in Kenya in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*

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Abstract

Postcolonial Kenya continues to grapple with the problem of gender inequality. Whether through acts of omission or commission and despite notable and significant achievements such as Wangari Maathai winning the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and the appointment of several women to senior government positions, Kenyan women still compare poorly to their men counterparts in several spheres of life. This is why it is significant that stories of successful women or success by women, whether real or fictive, need to be told and highlighted. Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* undertakes such a task. The several female protagonists in the text, representing different historical periods in Kenya's history, symbolically articulate a kind of womanhood in contemporary Kenya that projects its own social agency and identity. In the process, these characters rewrite the persona that has been allocated to women in postcolonial Kenya's national story. This essay contends that Ogola's text seeks to project Kenyan women as capable of not only telling their own stories but also of claiming their rightful place and identity in the broader national life.