

# An Examination of Catholicism as Social Vision for Women Emancipation in Post-Independence Kenya in Margaret Ogola's *The River and The Source* and *I Swear by Apollo*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the impact that significant social change has on the images of the woman as explored by Margaret Ogola in her two novels *The River and the Source* (1994) and *I Swear by Apollo* (2000). The focus is on Ogola's contestations of cultural definitions of the African woman. The study is also interested in making explicit Margaret Ogola's ideological position, especially in so far as the position directs her exploration. This paper, as such, tries to define Margaret Ogola's vision for women in the Kenyan society as reflected in her fiction. The study is guided by feminist literary theory in its eclectic mode, especially in its Marxist feminist and Liberal orientation. In these strands, feminist theories enable us to understand the category of woman as a cultural construct that must therefore be dismantled in order to re-evaluate women's experiences. The justification for this is that the study's interest is in the images of the woman and feminists have done quite a lot of useful work in reconstructing these images through placing the woman at the centre of discourse. The paper focuses on how Margaret Ogola constructs the place of the woman in the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural environments in post-independence Kenyan society.

**Keywords:** Catholicism, Social Vision, Women Emancipation, Post-Independence Kenya, Margaret Ogola, *The River and the Source*, *I Swear by Apollo*

## 1. Introduction

Margaret Ogola's contribution to Kenya's (Africa's) literary scene is commendable. Her first novel, *The River and the Source* (1994) has won two prizes, the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 1995 and Commonwealth Writers' Prize Africa Region Best first book. It is notable that the high level of literary accomplishment evident in her novels has earned them a place in the secondary school and university Literature syllabus. Indeed, *The River and the Source* was a set book for KCSE Literature syllabus between the years 1999 to 2002 and it is back in the current secondary English syllabus as from 2012. She is a writer deserving serious critical attention, yet she has received almost negligible critical opinion.

A large corpus of objective critical attempts at exploring *The River and the Source* is in the form of study guides meant for secondary school students. Since the guides cover a wide spectrum of topics, they act as eye-openers to the gist of the novel. The guides also touch on matters imperative to this paper such as the place of the African woman in society at various historical epochs and the struggles she has had to undergo in order to change that position.

Ogola's second novel, *I Swear by Apollo* (2002), has not received much critical attention. Besides, there is scarcity of criticism, especially focused on African female writers although they have contributed significantly to African Literature. Brown (1981) argues rightly that interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. She continues to say that the women writers of Africa are the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male oriented studies in the field. Since the paper examines the changing roles and images' of women in Ogola's fiction to communicate her ideas, this work is an invaluable contribution to literary criticism in general.

The examination of Ogola's fictional works is intended to build on the criticism of African women writers because they have contributed immensely to the understanding of the African society. In this literary tradition characterized by dominant male presentation of female, studies of female writers like Margaret Ogola reveal the African woman's side of the story. Hence, this paper is timely and important in so far as it attempts to concern itself with the woman's response to what has been written on African women.

### ***1.1 Ideology and the Images of Women in African Literature***

The Canadian Students' Dictionary (1983) defines ideology as a group of political and social ideas that help to determine the thinking and behaviour of a class, party, nation and so forth. However, Hawthorn (1994) argues that there is no definition for this term which can hope to provide a single and unambiguous meaning; instead, a cluster of related but not always compatible meanings. Marx initially defined ideology as "the ruling ideas of the ruling class." The ideas that prevail in a culture tend by and large to be ones that certify as legitimate the shape of that society and to reinforce the hegemony of the ruling elite.

Marx and Engels (1970) postulate that an ideology reflects the ideas, living conditions or interests of a particular social class and that those in the grip of the ideology are not aware of this, but think that their ideas are correct because they seem to accord with reality, not realizing that the reality in question is particular not general and that it has itself created the seemingly true ideas. They further argue that ideology may be lived by, and may control individuals other than the interests it reflects or expresses.

Eagleton (1976) describes ideology as a complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as "natural" or not seen at all. Ideology is not, Eagleton (ibid.) remarks, "a set of doctrines: rather it signifies the way men live out their roles in class society, the values, ideas and images which tie them by their social functions and so prevent them from the knowledge of society as a whole" (p. 16-17).

Ideology, however, is not simply determined by the economic and the political but may be thought of as having a relative power and life of its own. What this means in the words of Kuhn (1995) is that "ideology is not necessarily a direct expression of ruling class (or gender) interests, at all moments in history and that at certain conjunctures it may even move into contradiction with those interests." Ideology then, is not a set of deliberate distortions imposed on us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live. Ideology is a system of representations through which we experience ourselves as well, for the work of ideology is also to construct coherent subjects as explained by Althusser (1968). But what is represented in ideology is not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.

In essence, ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world – real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence; but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted within them. Althusser (ibid.) talks of ideology as a 'material practice.' In this sense, it exists in the behaviour of people acting according to their beliefs.

Bennett and Nicholas (1999) further argue that ideology is a process of cultural signification and personal formation that cannot be summed up as "ruling ideas." It also consists of training in certain practices of self discipline or certain modes of self identification. We all learn to think and act as if we were perfectly free while simultaneously and unconsciously acceding to all sorts of regimens that betoken our obedience and submission, learn to behave 'well', which is to say in accordance with the dictates of the social system in which we live; but we do so voluntarily as if they were not dictates at all.

In this paper, ideology is used to mean patriarchal ideology and the way this ideology constricts and constructs individuals as subjects categorized according to the socially defined gender identities with their accompanying roles. The paper thus unravels the underlying ideology upon which patriarchy stakes itself and in so doing points to how Margaret Ogola in her novels envision a way out for the oppressed female gender in such a system.

### ***1.2 Theoretical Perspective to Women Emancipation***

In the relationship between social change and the images of the female character in Ogola's fiction, the author adopts views within the feminist theory, particularly the Liberal and the Marxist feminist strands. The strands enable us to look at the social structure as informed by gender differences and the fact that gender is socially constructed.

The Liberal feminist strand posits that women and men are similar in nature but that "women suffer from systematic social injustices because of their sex" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 12) and are therefore deprived of the opportunity to realize their full potential. Liberalists such as Wollstonecraft (1792) and Friedan (1963) explain gender inequality with an identification of the sexual division of labour and the existence of separate public and private spheres of social activity. In the private sphere is to be found the demanding, unpaid and undervalued tasks associated with housework and child-care and this is where women are located. Men, on the other hand, are to be found in the public sphere where money, power, status, freedom and the opportunity for growth and self-worth are to be found.

The systems that restrict women's access to the public sphere and instead burden them with responsibility in the private sphere produce gender inequality. The strategies adopted within this feminist thought for the elimination of gender equality include the development of equal economic opportunity. The Liberal feminists posit that:

a model of female equality within a system of beliefs that operate on the assumed right to participate in the free market economy despite the fact that for many women, free engagement in the economy is not viable (Whelehan, 1995, p. 34).

The other important strategy raised includes reorganizing family life so that responsibility is shared between both parties. The strand then seeks to eliminate gender dichotomies by playing down the notion of gender difference and replacing it with emphasis on sameness. For liberal feminists, the ideal gender arrangement is one in which each individual chooses the lifestyle most suitable to her/him and that choice accepted and respected.

On the other hand, Marxist feminists argue that women's subordination in society results not from biological or hereditary factors but from social arrangements. They locate women's oppression within the realm of capitalist/private property system. Rubin in *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex* (1975) states that:

... a wife is among the necessities of a worker, that women rather than men do house work, and that capitalism is heir to a long tradition in which women do not lead, and in which women do not talk to god (Rubin, as cited in Ryan & Rivkin, 1998, p. 537).

From the foregoing perspective, it is evident that economic relations of production overflow into domestic labour: "since the production and reproduction of labour power take place substantially within the family through the labour of the house wife, then it is clear that her labour is in one way or another crucial to the generation of surplus value" (Kuhn & Wolpe, 1978, p. 57).

Marxist feminists focus on gender relations within the class system, seeing the quality of each individual's experience as a reflection of both his/her class position and gender. However, within any class, women are less privileged than men in their access to material goods, power, status and possibilities for growth. The source of this inequality emanates from the organization of capitalism itself and this feminist strand believes that the emancipation of women would be a by-product of the creation of socialism; hence the transition of communism would provide the context in which a sexually egalitarian society would be founded.

The two feminist strands imply a commitment towards changing the social structure by making it less oppressive to women. Central to feminism is the premise that women have been left out, considered the other and rendered invisible and that, women's and men's positions in society are the result of social rather than biological factors. Marxist feminists tend to see society as divided into different social groups, the major divisions being between men (capitalists) and women (workers) and that these divisions are characterized by oppression and exploitation. They see the oppression and exploitation of women by men as causing gender inequality. They argue that society is structured in such a way that men have most of the power in families. That they wield a lot of economic power and monopolize positions of power is affirmed by what Schipper in *Mother Africa on a Pedestal* says:

A recent UN study of women's position in the world showed that women do two-thirds of all the work both within and outside the home. But they only receive 10 percent of all the money earned on earth. And they possess less than a hundredth of all the wealth of the world (Jones *et al.*, 1987, p. 35).

The feminists agree on the idea that society has constructed a framework that perpetuates male dominance and female subordination. This system, they argue, is sustained by socio-cultural stereotypes about gender.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

This study examines how social change affects the socio-cultural perception of women in Ogola's fictional world. The woman character depicted in Ogola's fiction is shown to be going through considerable changes that begin right from the pre-colonial through the colonial and to the post-colonial times. This paper, therefore, seeks to analyse the extent to which those experiences have positively contributed to the images and status of women in society. By so doing, the paper shines a spotlight on the social vision of the author towards the emancipation of women in post-independence Kenya.

### **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study focused on critical readings of the primary texts, *The River and the Source* (1994) and *I Swear by Apollo* (2002). Ogola's other work, *Educating in Human Love* which was co-authored with her husband George, was left out for the simple reason that none of the features of her fiction that the study concerned itself with were distinct in it. The other text *Place of Destiny* was also left out because of the time schedule meant for the project. However, these and the chapter she contributed in *Empowerment of Women*, which came out of the Beijing Conference in 1995 together with a large corpus of other feminist writings, were part of the secondary texts and were referred to from time to time.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Comprehensive library research formed the basic method used to gather material for the purpose of the study. As is characteristic of critical studies, broad readership of the theory of feminism was useful to the work. The emphasis was on the stratification of society based on gender and the women's struggle for equal opportunities over a period of time covering pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times. Other sources included critical works on Ogola's writing. However, for the purpose of authentic analysis the study concentrated on the primary texts.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

As a writer with a social vision, Margaret Ogola preoccupies herself with how society can be re-ordered and re-shaped. Ogola addresses problems appertaining to social, cultural, moral and spiritual interactions. She opines on a wide spectrum of human life extolling and motivating the African woman's struggles to free herself from patriarchy while castigating and exposing oppressive tendencies in the patriarchal system, thereby indirectly presenting solutions, ways and means of transforming the rigid world. Ogola's convictions on how life ought to be tend to take religious leanings.

Commenting on *The River and the Source* in his critical work, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*, Simatei states that:

It gestures towards a Christian (Catholic) ideology which it promotes as the essential foundation of family and by extension, national life. The promotion of Roman Catholicism and hence the privileging of Judeo-Christian principles of redemption is the most overtly encoded project of Ogola's novel (p. 157).

Taking this cue, the text therefore, is in keeping with what Suleiman (1993) calls an ideological novel: that which "signals itself to the reader as didactic in intent seeking to demonstrate the validity of political, philosophical or religious doctrine" (p. 7).

### **3.1 Catholicism and Social Order**

As a matter of fact, Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1994) and *I Swear by Apollo* (2002) do not lay much emphasis on the political life of society nor on the feminist politics per se. Though the author may be seen to be challenging a vision of history that denigrates women, the issue of equity inherent in the two novels may not wholly constitute feminism, but rather may be seen to consolidate the Christian teaching of "equality for all."

A close examination of the two texts reveals Ogola as a religious teacher interested in disseminating the teachings of the Catholic Church besides explaining the church doctrine and its values. Through Wandia's talk with Johny in *I Swear by Apollo*, for example, the author reveals the centrality of Christianity in the text:

Why is it that you believe almost any nonsense except the obvious - that man and the universe were brought into being, an act usually called creation by an intelligent mind, and for a purpose which though hidden in the muck of human history is surely unfolding? (p. 24).

And in the same text, the author, through the narrator, portrays Christianity as the highest good particularly in 'halls of academia'

Christianity is a religion which demands simplicity of heart, but how truly hard it is to be simple in the midst of the backs tabbing and glory-seeking which is the perpetual curse of the world of learning and the learned (p. 78).

The narrator further argues, "But surely, a priest defending a doctorate in philosophy or theology can hardly be the same as someone defending a doctorate in something purely secular" (p. 78). The author's concern in propagating Catholic virtues in the two texts is clearly spelt out. As such from the two novels, one can rightly say that we are given a social vision that is positively inclined towards Roman Catholicism. The author envisions a society which is ordered and maintained by Roman Catholic principles as shown in some of the descriptions in her novels. She describes the order and harmony in Elizabeth Awiti's and Wandia Sigu's family in a way that shows her appreciation for families controlled and guided by Roman Catholic principles. In *The River and the Source*, for example, Elizabeth Awiti brings up her children in a catholic environment and two of them, Tony and Vera, dedicate their entire lives to the service of God:

Soon you will be a cardinal and then you can choose the Pope or be Pope yourself," declared Tony with proprietary pride. He seemed to know a lot about these matters and his parents looked at him with interest. Could they be having a budding vocation in their midst? His mother mission-bred as she was and still a firm Catholic after all these years, was all for it. Mark had his doubts. It wasn't that he was not a good Catholic, it was just that he did not believe as fervently as his wife did, though he thought that religion on the whole was a good thing (p. 173).

And in *I Swear by Apollo*, the guiding principle in the family of Wandia and Aoro Sigu is Catholicism:

But then all members of the Sigu family were highly independent and self-determining sort of people. Wandia had embraced the faith later but had firm and cogent ideas on how it was to be practised in her house. After the age of fifteen she appealed to reason but before that age you did exactly what you were told ... (p. 46).

The above quotation is illustrative of the fundamentality of Catholicism in the success of a family unit. Maintenance of harmony, order and stability in a family is owed to religious doctrine and religious values as the author perceives. This is the author's way of stating that without Catholic principles in a family the institution of marriage and the family is doomed to fail. Ogola envisions relationships which are founded on Christian principles and on sincerity. She presents a relationship where there is lack of recognition for God and where materialism is the propelling factor as immoral and short-lived. This has been reflected mostly through Becky. The marriage of Becky to John Courtney in *The River and the Source* is portrayed as a failed marriage because it is not controlled and guided by Catholic principles but rather build on monetary terms: "Of course I like money and all it can buy but there have been richer men - who are not only black but have offered me even more than he can." (p. 209). From the foregoing quotation it is clear that Becky adores money and that all her relationships with men are based on pecuniary gains more than anything else. The author is suggesting here that Catholicism and not money is what brings an individual happiness. Becky "remained unhappily aloof" (p. 258) yet she is depicted as possessing a lot of money and living in a luxurious apartment: "It is true that money cannot buy happiness or I would have been happy; but it can buy pretty well everything else" (p. 225).

In the character of Becky, the author is saying that without religion an individual is disorderly and immoral. The author is clear in her vision that choosing a path devoid of spiritual guidance is detrimental to one's own personal well-being. Becky reckons late in her life that choosing the wrong way has grave consequences which include death:

... for I found out however late ,that everything, everything has a price. This is the price of living the way I have lived. So be it; I will pay it (p. 266).

This demonstrates that Ogola disapproves of such immorality as promiscuity. She puts emphasis on virtuous lives while castigating those people who do not uphold morality. The lesson that Ogola raises through Becky is that you shall reap what you sow. Ogola demonstrates a vision that is geared towards attainment of moral uprightness in whatever facet of one's social and spiritual life. She views moral uprightness and success in social lives as something that will only be achieved when there is respect for and recognition of God. The Courtney children, Alicia and Johny, are brought up in an environment devoid of spiritual teaching and are, therefore, unhappy. They do not find happiness until they are brought up in Wandia's and Aoro's family where Catholic principles are upheld.

The successful marriages of Elizabeth Awiti and that of Wandia Sigu began with church weddings and the fact that Alicia's marriage to Brett and Johny's to Kandi begin in the church foreshadow their successes. The author as such, uses the marriages of Awiti and Wandia to send us a message of societal order and public morality. In short, religion is portrayed as creating order in a family which in essence is a microcosm of society. The success of the Sigu children in education and in their various professions can be interpreted as the author's way of stating that the most orderly members in society are also the most successful in competitive fields such as education.

At an individual level, Catholicism is portrayed as giving spiritual satisfaction. The descriptions of the conversions of Akoko, Nyabera and Wandia in *The River and the Source* reflect Catholicism as having an element of liberation for the oppressed and the suffering. For instance, when Nyabera loses all her children and her husband and suffers unbearable misery, she turns to the new religion and she finds it consoling:

Suddenly listening to all this Nyabera knew that she had made the right decision. She was only thirty and had been on the threshold of despair. It did not matter that she did not understand the language. Some feelings go beyond words (p. 97).

The foregoing quotation has far-reaching ideological implications in the sense that Nyabera's conversion to Roman Catholicism does not only provide an answer to her anguish but also implants the Catholic seed that remains in the Akoko family for many generations transcending pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. The hope and solace that she receives from the church contrast sharply with the misery experienced under patriarchal order of pre-colonial society. This, in fact, is the author's way of foregrounding Catholicism as a panacea for combating pre-colonial patriarchal injustices hence making life meaningful.

Moreover, in the same text, Wandia who has been an agnostic blames God for the suffering of her son, Daniel, who has leukaemia but when Vera tells her that God is in control and she later discovers that her son is not fatally ill, she turns to God to plead for his life and also for consolation:

"Where is your God?" A question as old as man's sojourn on this earth.

"Here with us in this terrible situation. Have no doubt."

"Then ask him for the life of my son."

"I already have", answered Vera simply.

A couple of days' later, it was confirmed that Daniel indeed had leukaemia - but it was not the most aggressive form and there was even the possibility of a cure. On hearing that Wandia abandoned her agnostic stance and went to church, a place she had not darkened since her wedding day ... (p. 270-271).

In the above quotation, the author draws our attention to the idea that God is in charge of whatever takes place in man's life. The author seems to be reminding us here that though times have changed and both Aoro and Wandia are embroiled in the modern world of academics and science, God is still in control and He has a role to play in human life.

In *I Swear by Apollo*, when Wandia is agonizing over the illness of Danny, her religious understanding makes it easier for her to bear the pain of the eventuality:

My poor baby, she thought, so God gave you back to me with one hand only to take you back with the other and in this way! ... He never really belonged to me you know but his was a charmed life. Part of me wants to hang on to him (p. 54, 55).

From the foregoing section, God's providence is highlighted in the manner in which Wandia accepts the inevitable and this can be interpreted as the author's way of stating that God has the final word in everything that takes place.

Moreover, Danny's illness is the author's way of teaching the fundamentality of hope in a human being's life. In *I Swear by Apollo*, when Wandia and Aoro are distraught about their son's amputation, Wandia recalls what Fr Tony once said to her: "Kill a man if you must but never deprive him of hope - for with that you kill him anyway and in a much more cruel way" (p. 77-78). In this context, Catholicism is portrayed as an element of hope in human life.

The author also suggests that illnesses like Danny's are there so that the glory of God can be revealed. The common scientific understanding that children with Down's Syndrome are born to elderly women is here proved wrong. Wandia is a young woman in her twenties when she gives birth to Daniel and Sybil who is older and a likely candidate, gives birth to healthy twins: "She was almost thirty light, wasn't that the age when you were supposed to be more likely to get a baby with Down Syndrome?" (p. 166). In Danny's illness, Aoro and Wandia get to understand that God works in mysterious ways. Aoro gets to understand that nobody can question God and by extension the church dogma. "In his heart he felt that God if He really existed should have spared him this great misery, he who had brought so much relief to so many other people." Aoro here understands that suffering as experienced in Danny's illness is not as a way of punishing the wrong-doer but rather so that God's revelation can be realized. Wandia also has a similar insight. The narrator says of her:

But she more than anyone else recognized that in every person's life there had to be a moment of insight and personal revelation. Perhaps it came through a sick child as it had been for her. Or the death of the beloved. Or the play of a ray of sunshine upon a patch of grass. Or the invigorating smell of air after it had been washed clean by a storm. Or to an inspiring healer of disease ridden and broken human bodies searching for some honesty and truth ... (p. 85).

The author then suggests that Wandia takes refuge in the church because religion gives answers to the things not easily understood like Danny's illness. In Danny Sigu's illness, the author demonstrates that God has a big part to play in our various fates.

### **3.2 Catholicism and Women Emancipation**

In *The River and the Source*, the descriptions of Akoko, Nyabera and the children as seeking refuge in the church because they have been persecuted by patriarchal tyranny on account of their being women, reflect the appeal that Christianity has particularly on women. Soon after her conversion, Nyabera introduces Akoko, her mother, to the new religion and she is almost sure "that her mother would take to the new faith like *ngege* (fish) to the water" (p. 100). This attests to the idea that both Akoko and Nyabera embrace the Catholic faith fully for the betterment of womenfolk and they establish a matriarchy of staunch believers. Ogola's description of the journey of Akoko, Nyabera and the children from Yimbo to Aluor, the nerve centre of Catholicism in the society, echo the flight of the Israelites from Egypt: "Like the children of Israel they left the flesh-pots of Egypt for the uncertainties of Canaan" (p. 104).

The quotation above implies that pre-colonial African society had elements of enslavement for women and that the other alternative for a better way of life is Christianity (Catholicism). The new religion as depicted gives the two women spiritual satisfaction because it "talks of a God who made meaning out of sorrow and suffering and who particularly liked the poor, the orphan and the widow" (p. 92). As such, Ogola projects a vision that is geared towards preaching Catholic doctrine as it offers ecclesiastical bliss to the suffering and the oppressed such as Akoko, Nyabera and Wandia. In Nyabera's baptism, for example, the author demonstrates a vision of a near ideal personal well-being through the transformation and spiritual healing experienced in Catholicism.

Ogola describes the positive effects of baptism in a way that reveals her appreciation for Catholic doctrine: "The

ritual and symbolism of the Catholic Church were balm to her wounded soul" (p. 101). The author's strong convictions that Catholicism is the answer to problems associated with patriarchal control may be seen to stem from her own religious affiliations. Ogola is a committed Catholic subscribing to the ideas of the sanctity of marriage, motherhood and the family. The author espouses a society whose transformation and order is sustained by Catholic doctrine and values. Moreover, in Akoko's and Nyabera's conversion to Catholicism the author shows that the individual is responsible for shaping and improving his or her own life. Through such possibilities the author provides a vision for her society.

Ogola intends to give women a vision of hope in their patriarchal situation and she does this through providing her characters with avenues of escape from the situation. This points to the author's individual perception of her society. She sees social change as stemming from the individual before moving to the larger society. Through the characters of Akoko and Nyabera in *The River and the Source*, the author gives us a grim vision of what it means to be a woman in pre-colonial patriarchal set up. However, her stance on the role of religion in the transformation of African society contrasts sharply with that of male writers such as Ngugi and Achebe. Pre-colonial African life before the incursion of the white man is usually the object of nostalgic celebration in the African male writer's novel. Ogola, however, does not reflect this vision of a lost golden age in the two novels under study. Instead, she depicts pre-colonial African life as often full of hardship and oppression particularly to women.

In *The River and the Source*, we see how Akoko and Nyabera are portrayed as mere chattels, property to be passed on from father to husband, exhausted while still young by ceaseless child bearing or broken-hearted and humiliated by hostile in-laws and hostile traditions. The author is of the view that everyone is entitled to the human dignity they deserve regardless of whether they are male or female because this to her is divinely ordained. The narrator in *I Swear by Apollo* says: "One could not have lived with professor Wandia Sigu without coming to accept the utter dignity of the human person" (p. 64)

The flight of Akoko and Nyabera from patriarchal hegemony provides a platform for the author to demonstrate that whereas pre-colonial patriarchal structures discriminated against women, the new community of believers grants them equal status. " ... while there everybody is welcome. Nobody asks which clan one comes from" (p. 103). This implies that the author espouses the idea of equal treatment for all. Ogola is committed to a world where people respect one another whatever one's gender. She calls for fair-play in our socio-cultural life such that individual freedom is permitted and no subjugation of one group by another should take place. The author envisions a society where people are not only ready to change for the better but also where people are not categorized according to their biological make-up. In *The River and the Source*, for example, she describes Akoko's and Nyabera's struggles against patriarchy in a manner to suggest she is opposed to a society which judges people not by their character but by their biology.

Moreover, in the same book, Wandia's and Aoro's competition for supremacy in the anatomy class can be interpreted as the author's way of championing the women's call for emancipation from laws and traditions that stagnate and inhibit women's development. In short, the author demonstrates her vision in relation to what she thinks is the potential of women. She suggests that women can transcend their socially constructed limitations if they embraced Christianity which is foregrounded as liberating. Christianity and education are highlighted as perfect combinations for the African woman's success. In the sermons given at the recollection we see Christians and religion as a whole encompassing important aspects of life such as work and faith.

Catholicism is viewed as an element of positive change characterized by progressiveness and fairness as represented in the lives of Akoko, Nyabera and the children, Owuor and Awiti. The author's description of the two women and the children reflect how dramatically their lives change at Aluor mission and how Christianity from then on shapes their lives and opens new horizons for change. The children's education at the mission school see them pursue different lives from the one traditionally designed for them. For Owuor, Catholicism becomes a calling which he takes up as he joins the seminary to train for priesthood. Elizabeth Awiti lives a very religious life as a teacher, wife and mother and her children, except for Becky, uphold Catholic principles. In fact, two of them, Tony and Vera join Catholic clergy, Tony as a priest and Vera as a non-marrying member of Opus Dei. And when Aoro takes Wandia home to introduce her to his parents and the question of religion comes up, he is clear as to which religion he subscribes: "I am no Tony or Vera, but I suppose I am a Catholic" (p. 255).



In the marriage of Elizabeth Awiti and Mark Anthony in *The River and the Source*, Ogola's vision of a stable, happy and prosperous family is that which is based on Christian values such as love and forgiveness: "All in all the Sigu family was a happy one. There was money but not too much and plenty of love - simple and unpretentious" (p. 162). Money which is generally perceived by many as a great source of happiness in a family does not supersede love in Ogola's view. And in *I Swear by Apollo*, the marriage of Wandia and Aoro Sigu reflects a happy family as that which accepts the hand of God in everything that happens to them. We can therefore say that the author in the two texts is not only interested in propagating Catholic doctrine and virtues but also in demonstrating how middle-class Catholics live out their faith. She views success and happiness in our social as something which is only achieved when there is love among family members and by extension the larger society. She also believes in a society where forgiveness is considered a virtue but not just forgiveness for the sake of it; forgiveness that is directed towards a positive goal which is intended to make a guilty person feel remorseful for an iniquity committed and thus seeks to change himself/herself. In this way, Ogola's conviction of a good society is that which is ordered and guided by Catholic principles.

In the characters of Peter Owuor, Vera and Tony in *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo*, Ogola envisages Roman Catholic life as the life worth aspiring to or worth living for all human beings. The all intelligent and highly educated Vera feels there is something lacking in her life which cannot be fulfilled by either marriage or education. " ... and yet she felt that her life was full of unanswered questions and secret longings" (p. 201). And in *I Swear by Apollo*:

Aoro could never really comprehend what it was that drove people like Vera and his dearly beloved brother Tony to do the kind of things they chose to do with their lives (p. 47).

In his attempt to oppose his daughter's choice of joining Opus Dei as a non-marry in member, Mark Anthony notices that: "... she looked so happy, so radiant. Anything that could bring such joy and serenity could not be that bad" (p. 252). From the above quotations, the mystery of the power of God in directing human life, that of women included, is depicted and even Johny who is considered as the family's avowed atheist turns out to be a believer:

"You misjudge me Auntie. I believe in the principle of the thing-"

"What thing?" asked his Aunt mercilessly

"That there is some sort of Supernatural Intelligence out there but nobody can really tell what he is up to - except perhaps that he is intelligent and therefore knows the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, and ... " (p. 84).

From the foregoing quotation the author points out that it is imperative even for the most ardent of atheists to recognize the superiority of God even when they claim to subscribe to nothing in the name of a deity. Johny subscribes to all sorts of scientific theory yet he recognizes the superiority of Supernatural Intelligence. What this implies in the author's understanding is that atheists are people in self-denial as shown in the character of Johny. We can also assert here that the author desires lives directed towards attainment of spiritual satisfaction. The ordination of Peter Owuor, Tony Sigu and the initiation of Vera into the Opus Dei as well as the baptism of Nyabera and the church weddings in the two texts is the author's way of providing us with instances of Catholic rituals and symbols. Moreover, these rituals and symbols enable us to see the Akoko family not only as subjects but also as agents of Catholicism.

However, we hasten to add that in projecting this kind of vision, the author apparently evades discussing such pertinent issues affecting society as national politics. In *The River and the Source*, the author takes note of the historical events of the Emergency period and independence and in *I Swear by Apollo*, she points out a bit of the rampant corruption in Kenya but she does not elaborate on these issues. This, in a way, can be said to hamper her vision because it suggests a reluctance in dealing with concrete contentious issues facing the society. Her approach therefore can be said to be escapist because avoidance of Kenya's political dynamics blurs debate on some of the "burning" issues facing the contemporary Kenyan society.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the study, it is clear that African traditions and customs are the main sites of the African woman's trials

and tribulations. Ogola hints at this when dealing with the traditional and cultural dispositions in Africa which militate against the African woman's personality. These are such practices as polygamy, wife-inheritance, bride-price and demand on women for reproductive fertility. It can be concluded from the study that the author's position on the plight of the African woman is that life would be better off if some African customs and traditions were done away with and Christianity (Catholicism) taken up as an alternate way of life.

Again, from the study, a number of issues need to be raised preferably for future studies on Ogola. Regarding characterization, Ogola's characters both male and female are poorly represented. The author tends to use the narrative and descriptive method of presenting her story. Though the women characters she presents are positive, she does not really allow them, especially through conversations and streams of consciousness, to avail evidence to justify the author's intended positive image. The result is that characters are sketchily presented and therefore, not artistically complete.

For the author to achieve complete positive images of the African woman, Ogola should have attended to male-female relationships particularly of her protagonists. However, these relationships are also poorly handled. The most noticeable weakness in this connection is the author's deliberate subversion of the male image at the expense of the female one. This, she does by eliminating the male characters through death. The deaths of Akoko's husband and Nyabera's are the cases that come in mind. In the case of living husbands like Mark Anthony and Aoro, Ogola does not give them prominence; instead she places them in the background.

Ogola therefore, is biased against her male characters. Thus, it would appear that her presentation of both male and female characters exhibit reverse chauvinism. Perhaps this and many other issues will need to be investigated in future readings of Ogola. Again, like the Western feminists, radical, liberal and conservative, Ogola sees the man as a contributor to women's woes. However, she does not suggest separatism. It is important to note here that though patriarchy is responsible for the African woman's woes, Ogola does not condemn it. She clearly recommends a co-existence of male and female members of society. Her women characters do not live in isolation though they suffer in the hands of their male counterparts. May be one could be interested in this aspect of Ogola's work as an exploration of what may be referred to as African feminism.

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