



Coming to Birth (Women Writing Africa)

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

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In this quietly powerful and eminently readable novel, winner of the prestigious Sinclair Prize, Kenyan writer Marjorie Macgoye deftly interweaves the story of one young woman's tumultuous coming of age with the history of a nation emerging from colonialism.

At the age of sixteen, Paulina leaves her small village in western Kenya to join her new husband, Martin, in the bustling city of Nairobi. It is 1956, and Kenya is in the final days of the "Emergency," as the British seek to suppress violent anti-colonial revolts.

But Paulina knows little about, about city life, or about marriage, and Martin's clumsy attempts to control her soon lead to a relationship filled with silences, misunderstandings, and unfulfilled expectations. Soon Paulina's inability to bear a child effectively banishes her from the confines of traditional women's roles. As her country at last moves toward independence, Paulina manages to achieve a kind of independence as well: She accepts a job that will require her to live separately from her husband, and she has an affair that leads to the birth of her first child. But Paulina's hard-won contentment will be shattered when Kenya's turbulent history intrudes into her private life, bringing with it tragedy—and a new test of her quiet courage and determination.

Paulina's patient struggles for survival and identity are revealed through Marjorie Macgoye's keen and sensitive vision—a vision which extends to embrace the whole of a nation and a people likewise struggling to find their way. As the *Weekly Standard* of Kenya notes, "*Coming to Birth* is a radical novel in firmly asserting our common humanity."

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye is the award-winning author of *Coming to Birth*, as well as many other novels and volumes of poetry. The first African woman writer to receive the Sinclair Prize in 1986, she lives in Nairobi, Kenya.

Valerie Kibera has taught European and African literature at Kenyatta University, Nairobi. She is editor of An Anthology of East African Short Stories.

Jean Hay teaches history at the African Studies Center of Boston University.

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