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Leave to live: The dea(R)Th Of marriage in Patricia Chogugudza's "The good woman" and Lola Akande's "Suitors are scarce in Lagos"

Abstract

The desire for marital settlement often tops the prayer list of many women living in patriarchal societies despite their level of education or enterprising ability. However, the increase in the demand for equal educational and employment opportunities has put a strain on many marriages creating the need for divorce and thereby providing material for creative writers to reflect such issues and the steps taken to resolve them in literature texts. This paper adopts Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Snail-Sense feminism, a strand of African feminism to study Patricia Chogugudza's "The Good Woman" and Lola Akande's "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos". The researcher applies a close reading of the texts to reveal the negotiating strategies women often adopt in strictly patriarchal societies to save their marriages or in extreme cases save themselves from toxic marriages. The paper analyses how women empowerment has been able to provide the support that women need to extricate themselves from harmful relationships and marriages.

Keywords: Patriarchy, strain, divorce, feminism, snail-sense, negotiation, toxicity, empowerment.

Résumé

Le besoin de stabilité conjugale arrive souvent en tête de la liste des souhaits de plusieurs femmes dans les sociétés patriarcales en dépit de leur niveau d'instruction et de leurs énormes capacités entrepreneuriales. En effet, l'accroissement de leur demande pour une égalité de droits à l'éducation et à l'emploi exerce une forte tension sur beaucoup de couples et sert de prétexte pour des divorces qui nourrissent l'imaginaire de nombre d'écrivains qui s'en inspirent. La présente réflexion qui prend appui sur la théorie du féminisme "Snail-sense" de Akachi Adimira-Ezeigbo porte sur The good woman de Patricia Chogugudza et Suitors are scarce in Lagos de Lola

Akanda. Elle se propose d'y examiner les stratégies souvent adoptées par les femmes victimes du patriarcat dans le but de sauver leur mariage ou, à défaut et dans les situations extrêmes, se sauver des relations conjugales toxiques. En fin de compte, l'étude entend montrer comment l'agentivité féminine dans la fiction de nos deux autrices habilite les femmes à s'extirper des relations conjugales malsaines.

Mots-clés : Patriarcat, tension, divorce, féminisme, snail-sense, négociation, toxicité, agentivité.

Introduction

Marriage has often been referred to as the oldest institution on earth and for women, the office of a wife is said to be the oldest profession. Many African cultures see marriage as the highest achievement a girl child can aspire to and so girls are raised with the mindset of preparing to become a wife and a mother. Mwandayi (2017)⁵³ has defined marriage as "the cog around which life in an African society revolves, the absence of which there is no society to talk about, no reason to live for and no future to talk about" (p.2). This definition captures the high esteem to which marriage is held in African societies and introduces one to the reason why young Africans are encouraged to get married. This could also explain why the issue of marriage, marriage rites and procreation resonate in African literature. According to Ini Uko (2017) the strictly patrilineal condition of most cultures in Nigeria and other African countries does not allow women to inherit property from their fathers (p.61-63)⁵⁴. So, it is only by marrying into a well-to-do family that many women can have the hope of a secured future for themselves and their offspring.

Eghafona (2021) goes ahead to define marriage as "the legally recognized union between two persons that is based on a sexual relationship. The philosophical basis for this union is that man should not be alone, but rather have a union that is completely legal and long-lasting; a legal union that is socially and religiously acceptable for sex and procreation" (para 2).⁵⁵ In some African cultures, marriage which is signified by the payment of bride price gives a man the right to the children produced by the woman. This is why in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Okonkwo could not marry Ekwefi

⁵³ Mwandayi, C. (2017). Toward understanding of Shona traditional marriages in light of ancient Israelites marriages. *Studia Histobal Ecclesiatical* 43(3). Pp.1- 26

⁵⁴ Uko, I. (2017). The feminine ontology and the African reality: Changing Dynamics in an evolving society. 52nd inaugural lecture, University of Uyo Press

⁵⁵ Eghafona, K. A. (2021). The changing phases of African marriage and family: Perspectives on Nigeria in the African context. The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

earlier because he was not able to afford the bride price. (p.76)⁵⁶ In addition to that, in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) Nwokocha Agbadi had to return the bride price Nnu Ego's first husband had paid (p. 39)⁵⁷. Children born to an unmarried woman are often regarded as bastards. Women also regard marriage as the only institution provided for them to produce and raise children who will take care of them in their old age and are willing to endure anything for the sake of their children. In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1994) Nnu Ego bears a lot for the sake of the children especially her sons. She agrees to marry a total stranger because according to her, "When one grows old, one needs children to look after one." (p. 38)⁵⁸.

In spite of the fact that marriages in African literature especially works of female authors like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Mariama Ba are replete with marital irregularities which often sound too good to be true, marriages are still highly celebrated and unmarried adults are regarded as irresponsible and unfulfilled human beings. This great attention paid to marriages can be explained by Mbiti (1969). Thus:

For African people, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet unborn. All dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. In a word, marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator (cited in Dyson-Hudson & Meekers p.301)⁵⁹.

Mbiti's assertion is relevant because it explains why fictional characters, especially the women, walk into toxic marriages with their eyes wide open just for the sake of producing children. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that "It is within marriage that the Nigerian woman suffers the most oppression" (75)⁶⁰. This is true because as a daughter or sister in the family, she is accorded some respect and has full control of her income if there is any. In Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1990) Amaka becomes a happier and free woman when she leaves Obiora and relocates to Lagos (p. 31).⁶¹ The same is applicable to Adaku in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* who

⁵⁶ Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann

⁵⁷ Emecheta, B. (1994) *The Joys of Motherhood*. Heinemann

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dyson-Hudson, R. & Meekers D. (1996). The universality of African marriages reconsidered: Evidence from Turkana males. *Ethnology*, 35(4) pp.301-320

⁶⁰ Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1994) *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Africa World Press, Inc

⁶¹ Nwapa, F. (1990). *One is Enough*. Heinemann

prefers to become an independent woman rather than suffer in a bad marriage (p. 168)⁶².

Athenkosi Mndende (2020) explains that "Couples marry for different reasons, such as starting a family, partnership, support, and others even marry because of beauty or financial security" (para 5)⁶³ Hence, it is important to note that people marry or choose a marriage partner for different reasons and when such reasons are no longer there might consider breaking up. Ada in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) who had been forced by societal pressure to go into marriage at an early age, walks out on her husband when the marriage fails to offer her the emotional and financial support, she needed to achieve her dreams.⁶⁴ In Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, (1989) Aissatou also leaves her home when she could not no longer cope with her mother-in-law's interference and her husband's betrayal.⁶⁵ One often hears of marriages that crashed because the women are unable to conceive (Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*) or because the man is either impotent or not able to provide for the family. Everyone enters the marriage institution with a lot of expectations and everyone is expected to bring something into the union to make it work just as John Mbiti regards marriage as "a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator."⁶⁶ (cited in Dyson-Hudson & Meekers 1996)

From our discussion so far, one would agree that the institution of marriage is a desirable one in Nigeria and in Africa. However, researchers are alarmed by the increase in the rate of divorce in cultures where such was never heard of before and wonder why women for instance who are supposed to feel protected and secured in the institution of marriage would opt out. A World Bank report of 2018 states that widows and divorced women struggle to survive in the harsh economic climate of the continent as the laws of the different countries of Africa do not allow them to inherit anything.⁶⁷ In addition to that, the report continues that some cultures "shun, ostracise and dispossess widows and divorced women." (n.p.)⁶⁸ This means that the average African woman would think twice before leaving her marriage no matter how toxic it is as there are a lot of societal huddles placed on her way to freedom if divorce can be referred to as that.

⁶² Emecheta, B. (1994). *The Joys of Motherhood*. Heinemann

⁶³ Mndende, A. (2020) Why marriage is important for African family building. www.news24.com

⁶⁴ Emecheta, B. (1974) *Second-class citizen*. Allison and Busby

⁶⁵ Ba, M. (1989) *So Long a Letter*. Heinemann

⁶⁶ Dyson-Hudson & Meekers (1996). The universality of African marriage reconsidered: Evidence from Turkana males. *Ethnology*, 35(4), pp.301-320

⁶⁷ World Bank (2018) *Invisible and Excluded: The fate of widows and divorcees in Africa*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

Nevertheless, some of these women who according to Chidera Ochuagu (2023), had been conditioned to become obsessed with marriage successfully find an escape route in spite of the patriarchal, religious and social pressure telling them otherwise (para 4).⁶⁹ That means that no matter how desirable the institution is or how dignifying the status of a married woman could be, most women no longer choose to remain in a relationship that offers them nothing but tears and stress. Grath (2001) defines divorce as "a legal or customary decree that marriage is dissolved. In other words, divorce is a permanent separation of married people as a result of unexpected marriage outcome." (cited in Arugu, 374)⁷⁰. What Grath refers to as 'unexpected marriage outcome' might be verbal/physical abuse, abandonment or infidelity. Ugwuanyi and Formella (2023) explain that

it is interesting to note that in the past, divorce was not something that was mentioned or discussed in the public. The idea is that once you are married, you are expected to stick with your partner for better and for worse. This makes a lot of people not to accept or admit that they are having problems in their marriages. In a nutshell, some ethnic groups consider it a taboo because it would bring shame to their families and culture (p.111)⁷¹

This is true to an extent because most African women were not financially independent in the past and were unable to make decisions for themselves. In addition to that, the Christian religion which has been adopted by many Africans does not allow divorce. That is why characters like Mama (Beatrice Achike) in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) are forced to stay in abusive marriages. Mama would go ahead to defend her husband before Auntie Ifeoma saying that he is a good man.⁷² Mama does not have her own source of income and depended on her husband for her upkeep. So, she found it difficult to take any decision that will warrant her leaving her matrimonial home. It is this inability of the woman to live independently that leads to the major tragedy in the novel which is murdering her husband.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will adopt the feminist theory as a tool of literary analysis with special emphasis on the African strand of feminism propounded by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. Maggie Humm (1992) identifies the different types

⁶⁹ Ochuagu, C. (2023) Why young African women are obsessed with marriage. www.chideraachuagu.medium.com

⁷⁰ Arugu, L.. (2014) Social indicators and effects of marriage divorce in African societies. *Academy of Business and retail management* vol. 4. Pp. 374-383

⁷¹ Ugwuanyi, B. & Formella, Z. S. (2024) Psychological effects of divorce on Nigerian women. *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies*. 5(4) pp. 111-118

⁷² Adichie, C. N. (2003) *Purple Hibiscus*. Algonquin Books

of feminisms to include: Socialist/Marxist feminism, Lesbian feminism and Liberal psychoanalytical feminisms and explains that they are all united by a common goal which is the understanding that

the emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depend on the understanding that in all societies which divide the sexes into differing cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men. Feminism also depends on the premise that women can consciously and collectively change their social place (p.1)⁷³.

This awakening of the feminine powers is what Ini Uko (2017) refers to as the new order which according to her, has "the prospect of ensuring that women's rights are respected within the family and in the larger society. It will make good the various global efforts by women and women's groups to make women's rights to be considered as human rights" (p.102)⁷⁴. This new order has affected the way female writers represent their female characters. However, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) agrees with Alice Walker (1983) that women of colour and especially African women are not properly represented by the mainstream feminist movement. Therefore, Alice Walker proposes what she calls the Womanism movement for African-American women while Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests what she calls Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWA) which is referred to as STIWANISM in feminist circle. The rationale behind these different strands of feminism is that every society has its peculiar problems and that solution to such problems could be found within the society (Ogundipe-Leslie p.230)⁷⁵.

It is based on the foregoing that Adimora-Ezeigbo identifies what she calls Snail-Sense feminism as an African model which African women can adopt to overcome and survive the highly patriarchal society in which they live. According to Adimora-Ezeigbo (2015), African women need wisdom and patience to crawl through the "boulders, rocks, thorns, crags and rough terrains." (p.27)⁷⁶ This strand of feminism recognises the fact that African women are hedged in by so many restrictions – rules of behaviour in and outside marriage, dos and don'ts in the religious arena and even sexism in the work place. Therefore, like the snail that negotiates through rough and harsh terrain with its slimy tongue, women are encouraged to use their God-given wisdom to negotiate/navigate through the harsh environment and to push themselves to the top as successful women in their careers.

⁷³ Humm, M. (ed.)(1992) Modern feminisms: Political, literary, cultural. Columbia Univ. Press

⁷⁴ Uko, I. (2017) The feminine ontology and the African reality: Changing dynamics in an evolving society. 52nd Inaugural lecture. Univ. of Uyo Press

⁷⁵ Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1994) Re-Creating ourselves: African women & critical transformation. Africa World Press

⁷⁶ Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2015) Snail-Sense feminism: Building on an indigenous model. Wealthsmith Books

Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2019) has identified Adimora-Ezeigbo's Snail-Sense feminism as a "reaction and an additive to the preceding feminist theories"⁷⁷. She continues that Snail-Sense feminism "hinges its principle on compatibility and negotiation like some of the other feminist theorists while adopting the metaphor of the snail as a model for achieving emancipation for Nigerian women" (p.3). The sluggish snail might be looked down upon for its size and lack of speed but so long as it takes its time to arrive at its destination, it deserves to be applauded. Therefore, women who successfully stand their ground or defend their stand in societies dominated by patriarchy are to be encouraged.

Okpala (n.d.) has noted that Snail-Sense feminism "lays much emphasis on individual success and development. The individual must empower herself before she can empower others..." (p.5)⁷⁸. This is the crux of the matter because a woman needs to succeed in her vocation as a wife and mother, her career outside the home or her business ventures before she can guide other women or children to success. It is therefore, imperative that the woman adopts a negotiating strategy that will get her where she aspires to be despite the difficulties or delay on her way.

However, Chioma Opara (2013) identifies what she refers to as an "incongruity" in Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist model. According to her, Snail-Sense feminism as an African model "sets out to embrace Western individualism which is essentially alien to African normative pattern and values (p.66)⁷⁹. But Adimora-Ezeigbo has already explained that her model is not altogether a new one and that it advocates Western feminism's individualism and African womanism's communalism making it what she calls 'situated feminism' (p.35)⁸⁰. This combination of individualism and communalism makes the modern African woman strongly aware of the fact that she is the one in control of her destiny and that while she works hard to uphold the culture and tradition of her people, she should also adhere to Ada's advice to herself in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) to "Be as cunning as the serpent but as harmless as a dove." (p.28)⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, N. (2019) Reflections on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo "Snail-Sense Feminism": A humanist perspective. *Preorcjah* 4(2). Pp.1-11

⁷⁸ Okpala, E. (n.d.) The sense in snail-sense feminism: A study of Ifeoma Okoye's 'A strange disease' & 'From wife to concubine' www.nigerianjournalonline.com pp. 1-12

⁷⁹ Opara, C. (2013). A house integrated: Reflections on the nuances of African feminism. *Critical Issues in African Literature: Twenty-first Century and beyond*. Univ of Port Harcourt Press. pp. 57-76

⁸⁰ Adimora-Ezeigbo, A. (2015) *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model*. Wealthsmith Books

⁸¹ Emecheta, B. (1974) *Second-Class Citizen*. Allison and Busby

The Portrayal of Marriage in “The Good Woman” and “Suitors are Scarce in Lagos”

Patricia Chogugudza’s “The Good Woman” tells the story of Paida who was forced to leave her matrimonial home because of the inability of her husband to accommodate her ambition to aspire for a better life for herself and her children. Paida, like every other Zimbabwean woman that contributed to the fight for independence, were surprised to hear that in the new nation women are equal to men (p.118)⁸². These “good women” would be shocked by the reactions of their partners who disagreed with the new egalitarian mantra and for Paida herself, patriarchy represented by the male relations in her life has a lot to do with the enslavement of women in every society. For Paida’s husband, Paul, and other husbands in the new Zimbabwe, wives should just be contented with being what they have always been – bed sharers, mothers, home makers instead of going about trying to claim to be anything different. Paida embarks on further studies to improve herself but instead of encouraging her, her husband, afraid of the fact that his wife’s success would challenge his masculinity, indirectly tries to make life difficult for her. He sees her demand for better marriage relationship as nagging and starts staying away from home. According to the story it looks like a general plan made by men in the new nation to subdue the woman by reminding her of what her role is supposed to be. Thus:

It was not just Paul, and the antagonism was not just against Paida. It seemed as if there was a general social anger toward all women who were perceived as refusing to be traditional African women. The attack was aimed at women in rural areas, in the market place, as well as in the professions. Men were using all they had to demean the new woman, whom they saw as a threat to their masculinity. To spite their wives, some men slept with their wives’ maids, friends and sisters, doing whatever they could to physically, emotionally, economically, or psychologically break the tenacity of the new woman (p.120)⁸³.

These are people who had joined hands with the women to fight and destroy the European settlers who had kept the native Zimbabweans in a second-class position. Now they no longer think that it is necessary to continue working together with the women to build the new nation. Rather, they feel more comfortable creating an inferior class of individuals they can treat the way they like and women like Paul’s girlfriend are willing to indulge them.

⁸² Chogugudza, P. (2010) “The Good Woman”. *African Women Writing Resistance: Contemporary Voices*. Univ of Wisconsin Press. Pp.118-130

⁸³ Ibid

In Lola Akande's "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos" one sees Sade a successful business woman being pressured into accepting a marriage proposal from an irresponsible widower. Sade's story draws one's attention to how close family members and friends can make life unbearable for mature adult women who are not fortunate enough to find marriage partners for themselves. Sade patiently bears sarcastic comments and nuances from relations and neighbours while waiting for the suitor that would deliver her from being referred to as an old maid. On her thirtieth birthday she was invited to a party thrown by her extended family in Lagos where she was reminded of the importance of getting married at the right time.

"Sade, something has been bothering us for a while now. We are worried that your father hasn't informed us about your marriage plans. We are of the opinion that this important decision may have escaped you against your will. Our intention is to remind you." I was livid, but I forced a smile... (p.134)⁸⁴

Sade was forced to intensify her efforts in making herself marriageable while she severed ties with the uncles and aunties who enjoyed her magnanimity and yet despised her for not being married. Sade's desperation leads her to place adverts on the pages of the newspaper, radio and television stations. She was tricked into going on a date with a stranger that turns out to be a prisoner in the Ikoyi Maximum security Prison (p.141)⁸⁵. Sade's determination to get herself on the marriage wagon is a reflection of her 'Snail-Sense' because she realises that the Yoruba society that she was born into and the entire Nigeria will never see anything good in her so long as she remains unmarried. As long as no man has picked her to be his wife, she would remain as merchandise in her father's house and attract pity or reproach from the people that know her.

The Representation of Marital Stability and Quality in "The Good Woman" and "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos"

To demonstrate that women can never equate themselves to their male counterparts, or rather, that women cannot have their cake and eat it, while Paida was furthering her education, her husband took another woman and even had a child with her. Paida could not believe her ears when the strange woman tells her that she too is married to Paul. She goes ahead to tell Paida that she is contented with being a wife to Paul rather than running around trying to gain equality with men. Thus, the new Zimbabwean woman becomes a victim of matrimonial breakdown due to her desire to carve a niche for herself in the social fabric of the new nation. Paida was shocked to

⁸⁴ Akande, L. (2020). "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos." *Suitors are Scarce*. Tunmike Pages. Pp.129-158

⁸⁵ Ibid

hear a woman tell her that she had abandoned Paul to seek university education because Paul had supported her. As a good woman she had requested for and gotten his permission to go back to school. She had also tried her best to be a good wife to Paul by taking care of the home and giving him enough emotional support in the bedroom. She even allowed herself to be coaxed into wearing the traditional waist beads that women wear for love making because Paul had said that he liked them. The major shock came to Paida when she discovers that Paul had taken out all the money in their joint savings account. In addition to that, he never wanted them to have more children after the twin boys and had sent her away when she got pregnant with their daughter but here is he busy making children with another woman. (p.122)⁸⁶ The same thing happens to Sade when she visits her new husband in Ibadan and finds out that his apartment was badly kept and that he had numerous sexual partners. Sade was shocked to find out that Gbenga has no respect for their union but she quickly reminds herself of the 'qualities of a good wife': pretend to be happy, show gratitude for having her own husband, faithfulness and total support for her husband (p.154)⁸⁷. These virtues are supposed to help secure Sade's marriage but it looks like Gbenga was bent on destroying everything in her. After consulting her father, Sade decides to relocate to Ibadan so that she can save her husband from whatever powers there were that wanted to destroy their marriage but the husband refuses to be saved. Sade's decision to move permanently to Ibadan is a wise one influenced by the African woman's Snail-Sense and desire to safeguard what is hers. Gbenga does not have any visible source of income and does not hesitate to squander Sade's money but she stays with him and continues to provide for him in order to retain her status as a married woman. Sade's father who is even supposed to accost Gbenga for treating his precious daughter badly had to advise Sade to move her business to Ibadan in order to forestall Gbenga's misbehaviour.

For the sake of peace and her dignity as a good woman, Paida had decided to remain in her marriage even after Paul sold her car (the car she had bought with her own money) and stopped her from visiting his aged parents in the village. She decided to bear everything for the sake of her children and hoped that staying with Paul would give her children the support they need to grow into healthy adults. Paida's decision to remain in the toxic marriage is a part of her Snail Sense wisdom – the determination to keep for oneself a little dignity in a male-dominated society that sees single women (unmarried, divorced or widowed) as abnormal women. In addition to that, she did not want to give the insolent woman who claims to be married to

⁸⁶ Chogugudza, P. (2010) "The Good Woman." African Women Writing Resistance: Contemporary Voices. Univ of Wisconsin Press. Pp.118-130

⁸⁷ Akande, L. (2020) "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos." Suitors are Scarce in Lagos. Tunmike Pages. Pp.129-158

Paul an easy route into the house she built with her husband so she decided to stay put to fight for her marriage. This determination to suffer which Ini Uko identifies as victimization among contemporary African women where they live to "please other people, while displeasing self" (p.46)⁸⁸ is also what makes Sade marry a 68-year-old widower from Ibadan whom she knows nothing about. She knows that Gbenga is not the best for her but due to the societal and family pressure coupled with the length of time it had taken her to find a suitor, Sade accepts him. Sade's mother who had been praying for her daughter's marriage vehemently opposes the union but Sade insists on going ahead with the marriage. When her mother tries to make her see reason with her, Sade quickly responds:

Stop preaching at me, Mother," I said fiercely. "Who is the right man? When will he come? When I've lost all my teeth and move about with a walking stick? There's no right or wrong man, Mother. Marriage is about how much interest, energy, patience, and perseverance the parties are willing to invest in it... (p.150).⁸⁹

Sade's outburst against her mother is probably caused by her determination to end her years of spinsterhood as she believes that her mother is also under pressure to get her first daughter married off. Snail-Sense wisdom manifests in Sade's philosophic argument here as she has come to understand that in her society nobody really cares about the quality of the husband but only the ability of a woman to claim the word 'husband' for herself.

The Causes of Marital Dissatisfaction and Marital Breakdown in "The Good Woman" and "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos"

Paida finally leaves her marriage to save her sanity after Paul and his brother, Del, gave her a merciless beating and her twin boys pleaded with her to leave. She was also forced to take the decision as her mother-in-law and other members of her matrimonial family were taking sides with Paul. However, she fails to get the official dissolution of her marriage due to patriarchal conspiracy against women rights. The same is applicable to Sade in "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos" who is forced to leave Gbenga after seven years of trying to build a home with a man who is not willing to assist her. Gbenga had proudly announced that nothing would make him stop sleeping with his female friends and had even told Sade that he was only married to her for "convenience" sake. Sade returns to her parents after her forty-

⁸⁸ Uko, I. (2017). The feminine ontology and the African Reality: Changing Dynamics in an evolving society. 52nd Inaugural lecture. Univ of Uyo Press

⁸⁹ Akande, L (2020) "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos." Suitors are Scarce in Lagos. Tunmike Pages. Pp.129-158

eighth birthday with a strong resolve to make the best of her life and to stop weeping over her inability to remain married. She is willing to accept all the blame the society would heap on her but like the wise snail that slowly but surely gets to her destination, Sade accepts self-love for herself, apologises to her mother for the way she had spoken to her earlier and settles down to enjoy her freedom from a toxic marriage. Paida even has to move away from Zimbabwe when it becomes clear to her that she would never be the woman that she has longed to be. She realises that her fight for freedom, for equality and justice is against the tradition of her people and would continue to pit her against both the male and female members of the society.

She was leaving the country because she was ashamed to expose her greed to her friends, to her family, to her children, even to her students. Paida felt that in her own country, among her friends and family, she was becoming the enemy. A divorcing woman was a bad influence on her brothers' wives, on married women, and on young women in general (p.129)⁹⁰.

Stigmatization from friends and family members seems to make life difficult for the woman seeking for separation and divorce but Paida's decision to leave Zimbabwe shows the level of her Snail-Sense wisdom. She does not only leave an abusive marriage but she separates herself from a society that has conspired to make her women helpless. She did not need to fight but allows her Snail-Sense to guide her through the difficult period of dealing with her teenage sons and her underage daughter. Paida's triumph though slow but steady is worth celebrating as it gives hope to every oppressed woman.

Conclusion

The two major characters in the short stories under analysis can be said to have demonstrated snail-sense wisdom and also support Flora Nwapa's assertion in an interview that women are indeed different because "whatever happens in a woman's life...marriage is not the end of their world; childlessness is not the end of everything. You must survive one way or the other, and there are a hundred and one other things to make you happy apart from marriage and children" (James, 1990 p.114).⁹¹ Marriage is still a respected institution in Africa but empowered women like Paida in "The Good Woman" and Sade in "Suitors are Scarce in Lagos" no longer build their lives around it.

⁹⁰ Chogugudza, P. (2010) "The Good Woman." African Women Writing Resistance: Contemporary Voices. Univ of Wisconsin Press. Pp. 118-130

⁹¹ James, A. (1990) In Their Own Voices. Heinemann

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