New Academia: An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory
(Online ISSN 2347-2073) Vol. III Issue IV, Oct. 2014

PATRIARCHAL URBANITY AND THE DIALECTICS OF GENDER DUALITY IN CYPRIAN EKWENSI'S *PEOPLE OF THE CITY* AND *JAGUA NANA*

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Abstract

African male writers have often been accused by feminists of misrepresenting the female in negative light. But, apparently, their works only reflect what exists in the African society; which is female socio-cultural subordination/anonymity. The issue is that the male writers are caught in a quandary; if they present a female character in good light, they are accused of being idealistic, that the reality is the opposite. If they put female characters in situations where they are socially invisible, they are accused of sexism. An exploration of gender configuration in Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana* reveals that, just like in the real world, the worlds of Ekwensi's novels are strictly patriarchal, but, in Jagua Nana, the author presents a female character trying to seek a comfortable zone within the patriarchate without necessarily fighting the system. Her vocation might be unsavoury and repellent, but females like her exist in the society.

Keywords: patriarchy, masculinism, *People of the City*, *Jagua Nana*, Cyprian Ekwensi.

Introduction

From a certain perspective, Cyprian Ekwensi can be taken as a 'complete' Nigerian. Born of Igbo (Eastern Nigeria) parents in Minna (Northern Nigeria) and educated at Ibadan and Lagos (Western Nigeria), he grew up speaking the three major languages of the country – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Acquainted with the cultures of these areas, he apparently was aware of their unique strictures on gender behaviour and expectations. But awareness or familiarity does not necessarily initiate influence, for Ekwensi was especially enamoured of city life, and expounded on its vagaries – in novel after novel and in short story after short story. Fascinated by the cultureless panorama of cosmopolitan living, enamoured of the kaleidoscope of human opposites, its amalgamation of diversities and exultation in these, he

created characters marked by a philandering promiscuity that battens on sexual frivolity and unbridled immorality. They become, not only symbols of the depravity of city life, but simultaneously its enjoyableness and attractiveness. They come from the recesses of the hinterland, seeking love and success, and sometimes do get a measure of both. However, what they have mainly got is frustration. Together with the few who succeed, all are illustrative of the fickleness of cosmopolitan success and achievement (Emenyonu).

Hence, and despite the carefree living and the almost limitless freedom the people of the city enjoy, there is a pathological thread of trepidation that permeates all their thoughts and actions. They might succeed, but are always conscious of the ephemeral nature of success in the city; the innumerable instances of failures make a real case for their fear. The uncertainties of city life are what Sango, the central character of *People of the City* knows best. One minute a man is happy and contented, another, and he is in the doldrums and very much desolate.

People of the City

In *People of the City*, Ekwensi presents a tableau of lives affected by urban vice and depravity, 'where business men are dishonest, where politicians are corrupt, where neighbours are enemies and friends conniving' (Emenyonu 30). It is evident that in the city deleterious pressures greatly outnumber the positive and only a few ever make it out of the dregs of poverty. Presented as a patriarchate where the 'strongest' survive, the women folk are the most unfortunate. Albeit the contradictory experiences of city-living do not seem to single out a particular gender, Ekwensi is apparently affirming that city life is more damning in its effects on women.

A few years before independence Lagos had already become a welter of crime, prostitution, corruption and all sorts of vices. But, like flies to a dung heap, the limitless possibilities it offers captivate and attract all sorts and all types, a few of the good but mainly the bad and the ugly; thieves, whores, demimondaines, social derelicts, tramps, politicians, merchants, musicians, a compost that underscores the city's immixture of fame and notoriety.

In the pre-independence years, Lagos, though not directly named in the novel but which is obvious, enjoyed the luxury of being the only urbanised centre in the country. Not that it boasted or paraded all requisite social amenities, but the scattering it had were enough to lure denizens of rural enclaves out of their backwaters with promises of a better future.
However, what gives in the city is its allure to diametrical antitheticals. Sango desires peace, but lives a boisterous life; he writes for the *West African Sensation*, plays calypso and Konkoma at the All Language Club and delights in whoring, which are all veering him far off his set course, which off course is to succeed in the city. Sango's hypocritical lifestyle no doubt informs Emenyonu's view that:

From the start until well into the book this (his craving for personal success) seems increasingly difficult to believe, because he is constantly jeopardising his chances for success. (32)

He is not the only one involved in this; his friends and acquaintances and quite everybody else has the bacchanal instincts, particularly the men. Relentlessly they pursue their desires, pecuniary and amoral, at whatever cost to their person or other city dwellers. This raucous living evidently conflicts with the need for peace and success. Attempting to strike a balance never succeeds, as it only diminishes the chances of success in both;

Suddenly he felt angry at the way he was getting on in the city. Something must be done about it soon, for he was certain now that the good things were eluding him. He was actually getting nowhere … he was still crime reporter, *West African Sensation*, and the band leader at the All Language Club. If that was status, then he must be sadly mistaken. (48)

Reformulatory moments like this are rare when Sango suddenly perceives the vanity inherent in his amorous liaisons which are undermining his other more important pursuits. Despite his assertions that he 'had his own life to lead, his name to make as a band leader and journalist (6), it only requires the bare shoulders and twisting hips of a city 'goddess' to tempt, tantalise and disrupt his feeble moral probity. He is never completely honest with himself, mostly not because he lacks the determination that will stem the tide of sexual promiscuity and allow him achieve his set goals, but because he perceives the conquest of women as a sign of his masculinity, an urbanised Don Juan who thrills the heart of women at will. As the narrator puts it, he 'was the city man – fast with women, slick with his fairy-tales, dexterous with eyes and fingers' (5). Thus he measures his material progress with his conquest of women. What matters to him is becoming rich and getting the beautiful women.

Hence whenever he encounters a possible 'victim', his lascivious spirit is enlivened, and he knows no rest till his libidinous desires are fulfilled. When he fails to impress Beatrice the First with his charm and grace, he begins to rue and lament his little progress in the city, knowing fully well that in the city status is everything. If he has a high status, it only means to him, machismo and access to more beautiful and sophisticated women. A low status will only make available to him women like Aina the jailbird street-hawker.

To Sango it is definitely not a moral issue; he obviously harbours no qualms about how he acquires wealth. The end, invariable, justifies the means. He is just like everybody else in the city. To him and a lot of the city dwellers, 'so long as the end was achieved' (77), 'what do the people of the city care? Nothing whatever' (112). Accordingly, Sango's discovery that Beatrice the Second's father is a member of the Ufemfe society does not deter him from courting his daughter. Rather, it engenders a feeling of jealousy that he only 'envied the man in his bright robes and handsome necklace of beads' (106).

The life of Amusa Sango epitomises that of most men in the city; they could have their cake and eat it. The only danger that seems real, that seems inextricably interwoven with city-living and poses the greatest threat to masculine success is ironically the threat of women. Paradoxically, Sango, who is described as 'the city-man' is continually upbraided to beware of falling victim to the wiles of women who are portrayed as 'witches'. This is a constant

refrain, and everywhere, almost to the point of boredom, Sango is told to beware of women, at times by people who hardly know him, but mainly by those who are familiar with his lifestyle, which is a surprise, considering that he is the one using women and dumping them:

Every Sunday men met girls they had never seen and might never see again. They took them out and amused them. Sometimes it led to romance and that was unexpected; but more often it led nowhere. Every little affair was a gay adventure, part of the pattern of live in the city. (7)

This train of thought is alright so far it satisfies his greed, his singular purpose of using everything and everybody to advance his progress.

Ekwensi, writing from the patriarchal perspective, has a harsh live for his female characters. They are presented as dangerous *femme fatales* marked by a paradoxical nature that apprehends both vulnerability and danger. Beatrice the First, Beatrice the Second, Aina, Elina – all quite ready to yield to Sango's whims. For him Beatrice I is the best the city could offer, she is sophisticated, sensually alluring and her provocative features are only evenly complemented by those of the city. She epitomises its glitz, its sheen, and its deluxe allure. Hence Sango's inability to 'conquer' her and his subsequent display of frustration is telling; if he fails to impress and subdue this epitome of urban sophistication, it obviously means he is a failure in the city. Eventually, Beatrice I is consumed by greed and insatiability. Albeit what she desires most from the city are exactly what Sango desires too, the author denies her success. She has to pay for her immoral and unhindered extravagances, for her wild enjoyment of the vices prevalent in the city and basking in its promiscuity. That she eventually finds love with Kofi is insufficient recompense for the humiliation she suffered in the hands of Lajide's harem, and the manner of her subsequent death. For being amorally attuned to the vices of the city, she inevitably does not survive the author's wrath (Emenyonu 38), but Sango more than survives the author's animosity; he gets his sympathy and ultimately thrives on it.

Of all the female characters in the novel Aina is the only one that can match Sango wit for wit and promiscuity for promiscuity. He realises this, which is why he refrains from helping her, knowing she poses a serious challenge to his sense of masculine dominance, and also does not fit in with his expectation of feminine vulnerability and submissiveness. To his chagrin and shame, he is the one that is constantly vulnerable and exploited in their relationship, which greatly piques him personally. Aina will not be used and dumped without taking her pound of flesh.

To show his displeasure at Aina's display of deliberate or innate 'depravity', the author continually punishes her as if he intends to utilise her, not only as a foil to Sango, but also as a warning. Indeed, there seems to be a streak here; all the promiscuous women in the novel end up dreadfully, having had their sins foregrounded. But not so the men. Even Lajide and Bayo are developed along lines such that, despite their sinful lives, their death gets the reader's sympathy.

Like Sango, Aina too enjoys the glitz of city life. Having been born there, she knows how to exploit the ways of the city. Hence she is a master of the several iniquities that populate the

city. She adroitly manipulates Sango, despite his notoriety as a Don Juan, which underscores his naivety and gullibility.

Ekwensi, ever mindful of her influence on Sango, ultimately destroys her. As if a life overburdened by promiscuity and poverty is not enough, the author makes her a kleptomaniac. Now her fate is sealed; if philandering does not destroy her, larceny definitely will. Emenyonu summarizes her particular attributes thus; 'the unguarded teenager … a fusion of all the evils that a teenage is likely to embrace from the wild life of the city' (38). If her deceitful, sly and thieving nature puts Sango off, her unrestrained and raw sexuality he finds irresistible. She is neither docile nor weak. Though Sango knows better than to get involved with the likes of Aina, he likes enjoying himself with a woman who is also aware of her hold upon him. But, if Sango finds her irresistible, not Ekwensi. Obviously, he (the author) is put off by what she represents, her corrupt influences and parasitic living. This, to Ekwensi, represents the worst the city could offer.

The portrait of Elina is superficial, not because her character seems to be out of place in a story that thematizes urban corruption and vice without necessarily condemning these, but because her possible influence on Sango is questionable. Phony as Sango's attempts at moral restraints are, he nevertheless recognises the illusive complexion of her make-up. She does not seem real. Her being placed in a convent probably heightens this perception, and Sango being a not so religious individual. Elina being, as the author describes her, 'home bred, restrained, pure, brought up according to the laws of God and the church … ' (61) only underscores the incongruity and dream-like nature of her character. Hence Sango's disillusionment when he meets her because he 'could never see himself desiring' (61) her.

However, she cannot be blamed for this, for the author has a different purpose for his protagonist and will not saddle him with a pure innocent virgin. If she is the 'moral conscience' (39) as Emenyonu puts it, Sango would have been made to marry her. But as it is, her cleansing influence on his spiritual privation and moral degeneration is of no consequence. Sango's materialistic leaning has to be fed, and what better to do for him than to give him Beatrice the Second, who, invariably, amalgamates all the valuable qualities of Beatrice the First. With Beatrice the Second, the author provides Sango with what he has always desired, a sort of *deus ex machina*; a beautiful, responsible maiden from a wealthy family. With her, the pressures of financial inadequacy vanish. She will not be parasitic, like Aina, or wholly dependable on him, like Beatrice the First would have been had he had his way with her. Beatrice the Second synthesizes the best in Beatrice the First and Elina.

To this extent, Sango has had his cake and eaten it; what is called killing two birds with a stone. Eventually, too, he is made to break away from the sins of his past, and renounce his enjoyment of night life and his sexual liaisons with immoral women.

Ekwensi's sympathy is only reserved for Amusa Sango. Albeit his level of immorality and materialism, when compared with that of others is not quite dissimilar, the others are not allowed ultimate gratification in his manner. Nevertheless, while the men are fortunate, the women are less so. Lajide and Bayo are somewhat eventually indemnified for their involvements in and subsequent discard of the atrocious lifestyle, but not so the women.

Beatrice the Second, the only one who 'ends' well is untainted by the vices of city life, and is unfazed by the glitz of city living, having, as it were, an affluent father to provide all her material needs. She provides the necessary cushion for Sango's soft landing. On the cusp of losing everything 'when all doors are closed', she appears as his saving grace, a sort of recompense for his feeble and superficial attempts at moral rectitude and living the good life.
The typology of gender casts in *People of the City* not only exposes the city as a patriarchal enclave which has no pity for the female folk, it is also testatory of the writer's concern. This discriminatory bent puts the female in the subordinate class, hence she suffers more. The city is no respecter of sex, but it is less harsh on the male.

Jagua Nana

But in Jagua Nana, the eponymous heroine of the novel *Jagua Nana*, what Ekwensi has created is a woman with a dual personality; she is at once feminine and at the same time 'masculine'. This dual structuring reflects in her thinking, her instincts and her behaviour. Her 'masculine' side is full off greed, caprice, aggrandizement, and is domineering, cunning, paternalistic. Her female side, however, is maternal, earthy, submissive and coy. According to Emenyonu (82), these two personalities (which he calls the 'whore' and the 'woman') are constantly fighting to gain control throughout the novel.
It is the 'masculine' streak in Jagua that makes her irrepressible. Born in a village that lacks every civilised social amenity but the basics, her pursuit of happiness in form of material success makes her existence anathema in a society where she craves what others will not vouchsafe to touch with a long pole. Her materialistic leaning not only ostracises her from every other person in the village, it also portrays an individualistic mindset suffused with ambitious instincts. The 'masculine' streak in Jagua has been recognised by Emenyonu as that of 'the whore'. As he explicates it,

(this personality) is controlled by raw emotions – lust, greed, power and hatred. When these feelings are in control, Jagua is like a wild animal. She is unpredictable, cunning and dangerous. (81)

As opposed to what she makes herself to believe, it is not her inability to conceive a child that forces her to abandon her marriage, but an insatiable appetite for the glitz and trappings of cosmopolitan living. Her promiscuous proclivities seem irrepressible because they are innate. Even as a young girl before her marriage, the way she wriggles her hips, pomades her face and reveals more than enough cleavage shows she is not only in pursuit of a man, but men. To show how successful she is in this, we are told that:

Every few hours she went down to the waterside and took off her clothes and swam in the clean cool water. The boys used to hide and peep at her breast and hips. She knew it and always teased them. All the girls in her age-group had married and had children but she has

resisted to the last, hoping ever, for some eminent man to come along to Ogabu to marry her. To the shock of the villagers she wore jeans and rode her bicycle through the narrow alleys of Ogabu and talked loudly and her laughter was throaty so that the men drew to her side and wanted her. She considered herself above the local boys, most of whom she had bedded and despised as poor experience. (125)

The problem, of course, is that living in a village is stifling to one with such a nature. So naturally she is at home where there are parties and drinks galore; the sparkling lights and the resplendence of the Tropicana, the sensual music of the bands and the more sensual response of the scantily clad and provocatively irresistible female dancers.

From the closeted world of parochial village life, she inevitably finds her way to the sophisticated glitz of Lagos, where she quickly finds her rhythm. Here she instantly discovers that all her whims are more than matched by the city's offerings of boundless vices and iniquities. Jagua believes in daring, and Lagos is for the daring, for where else will a duck feel comfortable but in water?

What makes her incongruous in the village is that she is a unique specie, 'a kind of curiosity' (134). She has no precedence in sartorial style, waywardness and general sexual abandonment that trails virtually all her instincts. Her dislike of her lifestyle in the village is better comprehended when one realises it is there she is most feminine. There she is married hence subordinate to her husband. Her spirit, however, will not play second fiddle: she must control not only the circumstances in which she lives, but her total world. In the rural enclave of the village her existence is conditioned and inhibited by social and cultural norms that are nothing to her but shackles. The life of Lagos, like no other, offers her what she craves most: a life of sexual and personal manumission.

To survive in Lagos, that is, to live in a society where nothing is constant but the corruption, the avarice, and the general communal nonchalance of the citizens, Jagua is well aware of what is required. But she is well prepared. The docile female, the subordinated psyche of the rural maiden will sooner fall victim to the destructive forces of cosmopolitanism. Her determination to make it, to succeed despite her lack of education, will be supported by an unwavering will. But this is not all she has. A will without the assets, without, that is, the particulars of her trade will lead nowhere. Hence her determination, coupled with her physical assets, and her knowledge of the necessary sartorial and make-up finesse conflate to make her a deadly opponent for any young rival in the demimondaine trade. If her namesake, the British prestige car – Jaguar – has few equals, so does Jagua. But she knows that at her age, attempting to carve a niche for herself in a trade that offers more opportunities to younger rivals will not be undifficult. She realises this, though, therefore her constant refrain; 'I don old'. Her awareness of this indubitable fact increases her coquettishness. The author reminds us:

When she painted her face and lifted her breasts and exposed what must be concealed and concealed what must be exposed, she could out-class any girl who did not know what to do with her God-given female talent. (6)

In the city, except in instances when she offends Freddie and has to bring him in, there is no room for the weaknesses and sentimental displays ascribed to femininity. Once Jagua understands this, she sets her mind to work. Her relationship with Freddie and Uncle Taiwo are only avenues for her to attain certain ends. They are pawns in her drive for personal fulfilment. They might be getting lots of sex from her, she naturally uses what she has to get what she needs.

Under the circumstances, Freddie, Jaguar's swain, takes on the female garb in his relationship with Jagua. Poor but ambitious, reserved but party-loving, he knows he does not possess the requisites to hold down a woman like Jagua. 'Money was her bread and butter' (12) and Freddie's salary for a month will not suffix to buy a dress for her at Kingsway Stores.

He also knows that to leave her will not be easy. Jagua's display of remorse after each sexual escapade is superficial, and he is not deceived. He despises her possessive love, and eventually he settles for Nancy, the delectable daughter of Jagua's number one enemy when he awakens to his position with Jagua:

He was angry because he had already known his true position with Jagua … He was the glamorous youngman in Jagua's life, the lover of the elderly beauty who must not press forward when those who paid for her luxuries were around. (29)

To leave her, however, is not quite easy. She has 'become his daily dose of anguish, lust, degradation and weakness of will' (34). What is needed is something dramatic to annihilate his attachment. When he catches her soliciting for customers, she knows the ultimate consequence of being caught in such a compromising situation. So, when she discovers the next day that he has removed to an unknown place, she knows that she has to find an alternative, and quickly too. This she finds in Uncle Taiwo, a loud-mouthed bustling politician in the mold of Chief Nanga in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*.

Before settling with him however, he decides to visit her village and then go on to Freddie's village too. What always appears most incongruous in Jagua's return to the rural scenes is the author's presentation of her enjoying and near-certainly luxuriating in the freshness of rural ambience.

The air in Ogabu delighted her and she took whiffs of it holding her hips and raising her nostrils to the palm trees … she was singing gently now and enjoying the very rare luxury of being free … No men ran after her in Ogabu, none of them imbued her with unnecessary importance. (53-54)

Moments like these, which are rife in the novel whenever she makes a return to rural scenes, ring false. Originally from the village, it is because the lifestyle prevalent in the rural area does not suit her that she exiles herself to the city. Hence, her sudden preference for the rural ambience where she is not known as a glamorite is superficial and 'unjaguaish' and contextual. Jaguar, who detests being a nondescript and unimportant part of the village mass, will not prefer the primordial ambiences of village life where her coquettishness, lipstick-painting, hip-wriggling and half-nudity will be perceived, not as sexually alluring but anathemically immoral and shameless.

To corroborate this line of thought and be true to her essential feelings, she does not stay long, and is soon on her way to Bagana. If Jagua's experience in the city does not furnish her with the requisites to live in Bagana, she does have the fundamentals; her feminine nature, which is subordinated in the city, will serve her with distinction in the village.

This, of course, is not initially made manifest when she attempts to exercise in the village the kind of phallocentric panache and dominance she has become accustomed to, it almost ends in tragedy and the capture of Nancy by the Krinameh. The scuffle with Nancy in the stream would have been, in Lagos, a common occurrence. In Bagana, it is not. Consequently, when she perceives such is anathema in the village, she recognises the quick solution: she has to become 'feminine' to earn respect and trust. But Mama Nancy and her daughter had come earlier, already have a head-start, and have successfully ingratiated themselves into the heart of the people. To combat this, Jagua digs deep into her feminine psyche, and just as easily turns on all her feminine wiles to elevate her status in the eyes of the Bagana people. Albeit Roscoe (1971) posits that Jagua's chilvaric exploits in Bagana are one of the weak points of the novel, they do in fact further exhibit her range as a chameleonic character.

She goes into the lion's den confident that she will return victorious, if not with the 'lion's hide'. But not before she has made herself 'really Jagua' (67), with all her seductive wits about her. The moment she lands on Krinameh soil, and perceives the glow on Chief Ofubara's countenance, she knows he is hooked and her mission half accomplished. And, by the time she has gone to bed with him and practised all her sexual wiles on him, she not only gets Nancy released, she also miraculously settles a conflict that has been years in the making. Despite the temptation to stay and marry Chief Ofubara, she knows her control over him will not last long, hence her eventual return to Onitsha to try her hand in trading, if only to prove to her brother Franco 'that she was not a 'useless' woman' (78). This too, not surprisingly, fails, not because she does not put herself into it, but because she 'found herself quite unable to learn … (the) new quality of patience without glamour' (79). For one who revels in showing off her 'God-given' assets, sitting in a small stall from morning till night with little or no sale is no recompense for the life she is attempting to abandon. Fearful of losing her 'Jaguafulness', concerned with 'becoming more provincial' (80), she quickly returns to Lagos to initiate a new and final chapter of her experience of life in the city.

If one is ever in doubt as to how Jagua fits into the scheme of things in the rural scenes, if her sudden love for the primordial setting of the rural life does not seem dubious and contextual,

the moment she arrives back in Lagos, the way the narrator describes her feeling of home-coming only serves to confirm that she is of the city:

try as she would Lagos still remained her *natural habitat* … she remained for a moment in the room, smelling its mustiness. At last she had reached *home* … she breathed in the air of freedom. (80) (My italics)

Consequently on her return when she seems to make the discovery that 'she was not coming to the Tropicana (and Lagos) out of necessity, but because it has become a part of her (82), this feeling is not unexpected as the city is where she is most relevant, an integral part of the mass, one of the necessary wheels of the gigantic machinery that is Lagos.

Fortunately, on her return she is immediately thrust into the major and most dangerous business of all; politics. Even Freddie Namme returns from London to partake in the deadly game. However, he is going to contest against Uncle Taiwo, who is now his (Freddie's) replacement as Jaguar's consort. Always the vindictive being, she initially lashes out at Freddie for his disloyalty and actually prays and works against him by campaigning for Uncle Taiwo, but she recognises the quality he represents when compared with her present horde of men. This cognizance does not, however, ultimately erode her disdain for him for abandoning her, particularly when she attempts to seduce him and discovers that her charms no longer work on him.

That she can campaign for Uncle Taiwo, even when she knows that his promises are empty promises says a lot about her and how she has become well-atuned to the vices of the city. Albeit she is quite aware of the dangers of Nigerian politics (this much is obvious in her advice to Freddie), but while she tries to caution Freddie's entry into the race for the Obanla constituency, she would rather support Uncle Taiwo whose victory will surely usher in her life a life of luxury for her, even if as a mistress. So she puts her heart into campaining, an uncharted territory for her but which she soon finds easy, being in possession of traits best suited to politicking.

Before election day, and to confirm her fears, Freddie dies in strange circumstances, a victim of political assassination and police brutality. His death, however, has the opposite effect for his detractors as it draws support for his party and its new candidate chosen to replace him. Uncle Taiwo is easily defeated. But Uncle Taiwo himself is soon murdered by disgruntled members of his party who leave his corpse on the streets to rot away. But not before the author has provided Jaguar with a saving grace, (just like he did for Amusa Sango in *People of the City*), a bag of party-money left over from the election day.

With Uncle Taiwo's death, Jaguar knows that her life in Lagos and what she has come to cherish has come to an inevitable end. Although she still tries to hold on to it by changing her base, her father's death inevitably pulls her away permanently from the city. His death and her brother Fonso's admonition ultimately break the spell Lagos has had for her for years. The break, for sure now, is total.

So she returns to her origins, mellowed by the spate of failures and the shame of returning empty-handed:

But I have nothing. Them seize all my thin'. How can I come now? Funeral is not a small thin'. How can I come without money! Is a shame! And I never been home for over ten years! No, is too much shame! (130)

But Ekwensi is not done with her yet. After returning for her father's death, she decides it is best to stay put in the village, considering the depth of her unpleasant experience in the city. Now out of the city, away from its glitz, far from its dazzling and mesmeric attractions she finally finds inner tranquillity within the bucolic realms of village life.

Not to stay idle she buys a sewing machine and starts a small business on the side. But this will not be her mission. Her duty is 'to look after (her father's) … property, to avoid marriage, for that would take her away from home and mother' (135).

This inevitably makes it easy for her to settle down. The rural environment provides a kind of respite and escape from the hullabaloo of Lagos. This repentant move from her seems to attract the blessings of the gods, and the author, in particular. Soon after having a couple of sexual trysts with a stranger from Lagos she becomes pregnant, but the baby could only live for two days after she is delivered of it. After this she is done with staying in Ogabu and plans to return to become a merchant princess.

Critics of African fiction have often taken Jagua Nana to be Cyprian Ekwensi's most realistically drawn figure. Perhaps, but if she is, it is because she is the most complex. She possesses in no small measure, paradoxical attributes which would have appeared strange in another character. She is beautiful, but her good looks is the work of a master artist; she is self-centred but also sometimes altruistic; she is self-assured but is often times attacked by bouts of doubts; she craves independence but desires a man to depend upon emotionally; she might appear empty headed but she is also cunning; she tries to be honest but is also quick to swear falsely.

Taiwo (161) describes Jagua Nana as 'the embodiment of all feminine vices'. Albeit Ekwensi has created a woman who is complex in character and apparently adroit at achieving her aims, yet, she is no object of social protest. Through her experience the writer brings to the fore the gory lives of the multitudes who labour endlessly in the city, but she is no champion of feminist rights. To her the first and most important thing is survival; her survival. She is not concerned with the particulars of male/female experience. She utilises the contextual circumstance to dictate her next move, hence the dual nature of her personality that has been the focus of this section. She holds no consistent values or morals, and neither does she worship any special code of behaviour. Because she is constantly on the lookout for opportunities or possible gains in every situation, she often comes across as greedy and self-centred, individualistic. This characteristic is however typical of city people, and Jagua, finding herself unable to 'accept' the terms of rural living, elopes to the city where she discovers that her 'talent' could provide her a livelihood. Considering the rigours and the

dangers inherent in city-living, it is the sort of place that seems particularly suited to the masculine attributes of ruggedness, perseverance, engagement, rationality, and objectivity.

Attractive as the character of Jagua Nana is, feminists have always quarrelled with her vocation. Prostitution is not an enviable trade, so she is not a positive role model for readers, no matter the artistic packaging or beatification of Jagua by Ekwensi. Flora Nwapa is quite particular about Jagua's profession which is unexemplary. That the novelist appears to be permissive of Jagua's moral laxity betrays not only his ideals of womanhood, but also the general patriarchal notions and attitudes towards femininity. Prostitution is the basest profession a woman could be involved in, but such a negative idealization of womanhood is characteristic of male writers. If indeed, as Emenyonu (80) affirms that in Jagua Nana 'Ekwensi intended to emphasize the influence which women wield in Nigeria … their power and versatility', his choice of vocation for his heroine negates this intention. But, rather than look at Jagua Nana's character as reflecting 'African womanhood unfavourably' (Emenyonu 94), it is more profitable to take her experience as a 'search for her true identity' and 'a study of a woman's intuition and instincts in various situations of life' (Emenyonu 90).

Conclusion

In Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, Sango, the central character, epitomizes the male principle. His materialistic leaning is matched by the city's limitless possibilities. However, though the novels male characters – Sango, Lajide, Bayo and Samil – do get some measure of benefits from the depravity of the city, it is more unforgiving when it comes to the womenfolk. The adventurous women end up badly, ultimately defeated by the inclement patriarchal values that prevail in the city. While the men seem to have lost all innocence and are ready to welcome all vices, the women, to survive Ekwensi's wrath, must retain some measure of innocence and maintain an objective distance from the evil attractions of urbanization.

Since the beginning of 'modern' prose writing, male writers have shown a consistent interest in the morality of the female. From Crusoe's *Moll Flanders*, Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, D.H. Lawrences' *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Women in Love*, female morality has always been a key issue with the heroines; no wonder some of these heroines, particularly the ones who are out-spoken, combine the attributes of the bitch and the termagant. This stereotype also subsists in African fiction in Jagua Nana and Ebla of *Jagua Nana* and *From a Crooked Rib* and Wanja of *Petals of Blood* respectively. The societies are still dominated by the men but the female protagonists strive to carve a niche for themselves and find significance within the limitations imposed by patriarchy. However, it is telling that Jagua has to use 'what she has' to fight back at the oppression. Jaguar might not be a feminist in the mold of Ebla or Wanja, but her private yearnings as an individual catenate with theirs as they, as females, seek to destroy masculine limitations placed on their paths and find a comfortable and significant zone, at the expense of, or even forfeiting, their

moral dignity. They are not scrupulously concerned with their chastity, knowing that it is all they have to use as a form of control.

This attitude is common with important female characters in fiction by male African writers. They always resort to using sex as a sort of control, as if it is the only 'tool' they can use to fight gender imperialism.

Hence Jagua's irreverential posture when it comes to sex, her total immersion in the sexual game and her luxuriating and basking in lechery and preference for the 'sins' of the city puts her in an uncomfortable position with feminists. Unlike these other women, she seeks personal gratification in sexual philandering, and she seeks to utilise sex to acquire wealth. She does not care if the men respect her femininity and individuality as a person. Put in the same context, other female protagonists (in fiction written by female writers, though) would have been disgusted by Jagua's venereal adventures, while Jagua would have been put off or befuddled by the feminist grievances of pro-feminist female protagonists in fiction by African feminist writers.

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