

## CITY LIFE AND WOMEN IN CYPRIAN EKWENSI'S *THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY AND JAGUA NANA*

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**C**yprian Ekwensi can be described as the Charles Dickens of modern African literature because he is the first among African writers to be interested in city life. This interest shows in the title of one of his novels *The People of the City*. The city that he loves so much and describes is Lagos. What he is mostly interested in is the seamy side of city life: prostitutes, pimps, forgers, burglars and crooks all sorts crowd the pages of his novels and have won Ekwensi the title of the first picaresque author in modern African literature.

As one of the first urban authors in modern African literature, it would be interesting to know what roles Ekwensi makes women assume in his urban novels. So far no attention in African literary criticism has been attached to the relationship between the representation of African women in relation to city life. The most likely reason for this lack of interest is due to the fact that the city occupies proportionately little space in modern African literature because of the literary expectations of Western readers on the one hand, and the incessant attempts of African authors to erase the white mythologies about the absence of civilised life in Africa before the colonial period on the other .

Two of Ekwensi's novels will be used to discuss the representation of women in urban settings: *Jagua Nana* and *People of the City*. *Jagua Nana* is the heroine of Ekwensi's second novel. Because the emphasis in this novel falls on a series of adventures involving *Jagua* as the most representative female character among the people of the city, Ekwensi uses her name as a title for his novel. Like Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, *Jagua* gives Ekwensi's book its particular tone, its atmosphere, its morality, and acts as a catalyst that makes possible for us to visualise the urban world of the novel.

Lagos in *Jagua Nana* seems to have appeared for the heroine as a place, a territory to which women can escape from the humdrum of rural life. In the last pages of the novel devoted to the meditation over her failed life in the city, *Jagua* makes the reader cognisant with the motivation behind her movement from a childhood existence in the Eastern country of Nigeria to the adult city life. Meditation has led the heroine to think with regrets about her wayward life at an early age when she is still living with a pastor father who doted on her. She reminisced about her being extremely fastidious about fashion and make-up, two signs of modern life that have reached to all evidence the remotest reaches of Nigeria around the 1920s that even daughters of pastors could not escape their influence.

Her reminiscences include details about her discontent with folkways. Unlike girls of her age, she was fond of going down to the waterside and taking off her clothes to swim in the clean cool water under the gaze of hidden boys on the banks of the waterside. She stayed for wedlock without the hope that a Prince Charming would come and marry her. Instead of learning to keep house, she took to the shock of fellow villagers to wearing jeans and riding a bicycle. She even broke St Paul's injunction not to speak up in front of local boys whose company she sought and dismissed because of their poor sexual experience.

What emerges from above is that *Jagua* is far from being a typical village girl. She is careless about the loss of 'respectability' in her village. To all evidence, her father viewed her 'deviant' ways as a disgrace and a 'misfortune' and he was happy to give her away to a "Coal City man (who) pressed home

his claim, and paid the bride price of one hundred and twenty pounds”. (p.167) However, Jagua was not a woman to be satisfied with the economic status she had gained by entering into wedlock with a man whose “main interest was his petrol-filling station and garage”. (p.167) The ‘angel in the house’ that the “Coal City man” became bored with her life as the “angel of the house” even she had shared in the ever-increasing wealth of a husband who “soon had a chain of filling stations all over the city and was able to buy a small car”. (p.167)

Her boredom with a husband who defined manhood in economic terms, Jagua started to blame herself for having accepted to have married him out of respect for her parents. What was even worse was her childlessness and her parents-in-law to have her husband married again. As a result of her discovery of her husband’s unfaithfulness, one day she left his home on a sudden impulse taking the train to Lagos. The choice of the city of Lagos was not fortuitous because it was viewed as a place of “freedom”. Her choice is the result of her having grown up absorbing images of Lagos “where the girls were glossy, worked in offices like men, danced, smoked, wore high-healed shoes and narrow slacks and were ‘free’ and ‘fast’ with their favours.” (p.167)

*Jagua Nana* is not the sole prose work by Ekwensi wherein the city setting is associated by women with “freedom”. In a short story entitled “Fashion Girl”, Ekwensi gives more or less the same idea when he makes his heroine choose Accra, the Paris of West Africa, as Jagua calls it, as a hiding place from a churlish husband. It is said in this short story that the husband of Jagua’s namesake “seized her and began pounding her. She never fought back, but worked her way to the door and ran out (...) She was well on the way to Accra.” Jagua’s association of the city with freedom finds support from other women characters in the same novel. One of them is called Rosa, a new comer to the city, whom Jagua has first helped to settle in Lagos. It is said in the novel that “the lowest and most degraded standards of living were to her preferable to a quiet and dignified life in her own home where she would not be ‘free’”. (p.165)

If Lagos is ideally viewed as a territory wherein women could affirm themselves, it comes out as a place of mutability in real experience. The name of Jagua is acquired by Nana as a result of the metamorphosis that she has undergone in contact with city ways. “They called her Jagua because of her good looks and stunning fashions. They said she was Ja-gwa, after the famous British car.” (p.5) The assumption of a nickname like this one reduces her into an object of male desire. Instead of bestowing her with constant urbane values, the city robes her in a distinguishable livery. The process of urban change brought to bear on Nana is wanton, capricious and qualifies so much her wishfulness for freedom in the city. Instead of affirming her freedom, the city has absorbed Nana.

Ekwensi’s novel qualifies the city in other terms than that of mutability. As an earthly city, Lagos is Mammon’s abode. Those dwelling in it are said to have gone there “to make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money”. (p.6)

The city converts women into worshippers of Mammon. Even heroines like Jagua who have seemingly quitted comfortable homes in quest for freedom to live one’s life have ended looking on money as an “idol worshipped in every waking and sleeping moment”. (p.30)

For the urban Jagua, the cash-nexus overrides any other considerations in her own mind. For example, during one of her nights out in a night-club called *Tropicana* she leaves out her date Freddie for a Syrian wealthy man. For her, “in the *Tropicana* money always claimed first loyalty” (p.15) regardless of the sentiment of love that she might have for Freddie. It is true that she loves Freddie but his salary as a teacher is not substantial enough to buy her a new dress that she has always imagined herself in.

Sentiment of love does not weigh much in comparison with Mammon, the sole divinity that can make her keep her glamour at a relatively old age.

To the image of the city of Lagos as Mammon's abode can be added that of the city as a "vanity fair". Again these vanities are mostly exhibited by women like Jagua. The novel starts with Juagua's observing her face proudly in a mirror held between her knees. Her pride in her body and her appearance makes her forget her old age and compete with a younger woman for the love of Freddie.

However, above all Lagos is represented as a space for prostitution. At the heart of Central Lagos one finds the *Tropicana*, a night-club compared to a "modern super sex-market". (p.13) Taking the opportunity of the anonymity that the city affords, girls are described as giving themselves to a voluptuousness that they could not have dared to display in a village society. Ekwensi represents harlots like Jagua and her friend-enemy Nancy as having taken their trade to casinos and night-houses that were coming in vogue in the Lagos of the 1940's and the 1950's. City life is closely associated with Jazz music and *Highlife*. When Jagua hears "the stirring throb of jazz", it acts on her like a drug and feels elated:

The music was tremendously rhythmic, coming from the bongo drums, and the bandleader, pointing his trumpet skywards, blew till the blisters widened and he wiped his lips and the sax snatched the solo, distorting it. This was it, Jagua felt.  
(p.5)

Harlotry in Ekwensi's novel is so rife that one wonders whether there is a respectable place in all Lagos for women to dwell in. No law exists to repress prostitution, so women resort freely to street-walking whenever the business of harlotry is slacking at the *Tropicana*.

The association of Lagos with prostitution recalls the Biblical Babylon with Juana as its harlot. It is not for nothing that Ekwensi has made his central character a clergyman's daughter. Such character conception permits him to view Jagua's movement from her country home to the city as a fall from grace. The moment she lands from the train in Lagos she is taken in charge by a pimp bandleader whose name is Hop Lips who sells her out to an Englishman called John Martell. She has remained his mistress until his return to England to his wife and his two children. With the allowance he has given her, she starts a wax-prints trade between Lagos and Accra.

It is in Accra that Jagua has learnt most about the world of fashion. In contact with the women of Accra whom she regards as "the real black mermaids from the Guinea Gulf ... (whose) ideas came from Paris", she has learnt how to dress herself in low neckline sleeveless blouses, wear high heeled shoes and ear-rings "ringing bells" as she walks "deliberately swinging hips". (p.170) In short Jagua Nana has become a black mermaid who has attracted many lovers to the rocky shores of her love in both Accra and Lagos. After having taken to the easy way of earning money, she gives up her wax-prints trade and settles in the central area of Lagos close to her favourite night-club the *Tropicana*. She has stayed a night-club prostitute until the end of story when she comes to realise at last that "Rosa had become -like many women who came to Lagos, like Jagua herself- imprisoned, entangled in the city, unable to extricate herself from its clutches". (p. 165)

Lagos emerges as a Destructive city. At the close of the novel, most of the characters are in one way or another maimed. Freddie Namme Jagua's boy friend dies in the game of cut-throat politics of nascent Nigeria. Uncle Taiwo another of Jagua's lovers meets the same fate after his loss of election and his embezzlement of party funds. Dennis Odoma, a gang leader who has become infatuated with Jagua, meets with death at the hands of the police after having killed one of their own. Since all the male characters who die in the novel have love relationship with Jagua at one moment or another in the story, it can be said that she is as ill-fated as the black mermaid with which she identifies herself. She is as much the victim of the destructive city as its agent, a Moloch who destroys women's children.

It follows from the above discussion about the representation of the city and women that the imagery attached to it is essentially a demonic imagery. This demonic imagery has many strands. One of them comes from Protestant allegorists like John Milton and John Bunyan; the other from Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy; and another strand can be traced back to the English humourists of the eighteenth century like Smollett, Defoe, and Fielding.

It is easy to recognise the parallels between Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. The story-line is more or less the same since in both books since they both involve characters of Christian creed who quit their homes in search of salvation in the city.

It has to be remarked here that Jagua's father, David Obi, is a pastor and that at one period of her life she sang in the choir of his church. Both the hero in Bunyan's book and the heroine in Ekwensi's novel are bored with the parochial life they are leading in their village societies and have followed their dreams for a new life.

However, there is a significant difference between Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. In the former, Christian and Faithful have resisted to the allurements of the "town of Vanity" ; As it is shown in the above discussion it is hardly the case with Jagua Nana. While Christian and Hopeful have made their way out of Vanity Fair into the well-tended gardens on top of the Delectable mountains ready to go on with their journey to the Celestial city , Jagua Nana bogs down in the Earthly city of Lagos pursuing the "*Tropicana* lights and the glittering laughter of seductive men, the sequin sheen of the fickle fashions". (p.173)

The difference between Christian and Jagua shows is that Christian manages to counter the allurements of the Earthly city with a sober introspective existence whereas Jagua misses completely her "pilgrim's progress" because she has given herself soul and body to an artificial way of life based on the satisfaction of the desires of the moment. She sounds hollow in her speech even when she addresses herself to such important issues as love; she enters politics with Taiwo not because she is interested in improving the way things are run in the city but because she enjoys the atmosphere of election campaigns. The narrator reminds the reader how people "pressed her in from all sides, wanting to shake her hand, to detain her, to chair her. She felt truly proud". (p.143)

It is not fortuitous that Ekwensi calls Jagua's first lover in the city of Lagos, John and that the same John leaves his wife and his two children at home in England. Details like these indicate that Ekwensi has John Bunyan's pilgrim in mind in drawing the character of Juagua's first lover. It is his kind that have built the city of Lagos, and have made of it a new Babylon for the Nigerians who will soon inherit it from the hands of the British. In positioning the city of Lagos and Jagua's experience there within a Christian moral framework, Ekwensi exposes the corruption of the Christian mission in Africa, a mission undermined by the modern style of life in the City of Destruction that is Lagos.

Ekwensi's reading has read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* at one stage of his education that took him all the way from Minna his native town to the Government College in Ibadan and then Achimota in present day Ghana from where he had graduated in 1943, there are other similarities between his novel and works of fictions falling within the tradition started in West Africa by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Two works can be mentioned in this regard because Ekwensi might well have come across them owing to the impact that they have had on the West African readership of the 1930's and 1940's. These two works are George Bernard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* (1932) and its intertext *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr Shaw* (1934) by Mabel Dove whose pen name was Marjorie Mensah. The latter was the first African woman writer from the British colony of Gold Coast, present day Ghana.

The likelihood that Ekwensi has read Mabel Dove's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr Shaw* comes from the fact that he has always shown interest in journalism. He worked for many years as a journalist; further evidence for his interest in journalism can also be found in his first novel *The People of the City* (1956) wherein the central character is a crime reporter for the "*West African Sensation*". Such interest in journalism might well have led him to read *The Times of West Africa* and its 'Women's Corner' wherein Mabel Dover under the pseudonym of Marjorie had serialised a reply to Shaw's *Adventures*.

The point here is not to go into research into John Bunyan in Africa and African readings of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The cases of the adaptations of Bunyan's book are mentioned just to show that there exist a Bunyan tradition in Africa centred on woman as pilgrims that it is not far fetched to assume that this tradition has an impact on Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. However, Ekwensi's has worked the Bunyan model that his book might well be subtitled as *Jagua Nana or the Progress of a Harlot*.

Like any progress narrative that of Nana closes with redemption. However, in redeeming his heroine, Ekwensi takes his cue from the Romantic tradition. As it has already been said in the above discussion, no Celestial City is even dimly visible for Jagua from the bogs of the Earthly City, the Vanity Fair of Lagos. Romantics like Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, just like Bunyan and Milton, conceive of man-made city as the deviation from grace. As for redemption, they conceive of it in different terms. Instead of the old faith in the Celestial City, they hold a deep belief in the redemptive powers of Nature. Accordingly, Ekwensi packs back Jagua to the pastoral innocence of the countryside. It has to be remarked that Jagua's father is a pastor officiating in the country. Since the father is dead by the time of her packing back, it is manifestly evident that redemption won't come back from religion from immersion in nature.

It follows from the above discussion that the setting is built on a vision of world based on an old split between country and city. Ekwensi has articulated his setting on two strands from the British literary tradition. What is worth noting is that in his use of the Romantic tradition he has not sought to effect a higher synthesis of rural and urban life as "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" in the manner, for example, of the Wordsworth of "Tintern Abbey" and "Composed upon Westminster Bridge", or the Coleridge of "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison", or the Blake of "New Jerusalem". It might well be objected that Ekwensi that there is a certain realism in the description of Lagos that would have defeated any attempt at synthesis between the stages of Innocence and Experience.

The description of such realistic scenes are scattered and few in the novel because the author is mostly interested in the "lapsed soul" of the heroine. Yet the ones that turn up in the book are so dismal as those that crop up in Dickens's novels. For example, after having come back from the countryside where she has gone visiting her prospective in-laws, Jagua started to look around her with new eyes. This is one of her comments on the filthy houses where she has elected to dwell for several years:

She stored away the food, then she took out her towel and went to the bathroom, but when she knocked a man answered her from the inside and she went instead to the lavatory. The same old bucket, piled high; the floor messed about, so she could see nowhere to her silver sandals. It was all done by those wretched children upstairs. **Why blame them when their mothers did not know better.** ...The unpleasant side of Lagos: the flies in the lavatory- big and blue and stubborn-

settled on breakfast yam and lunch-time stew (they were invisible in a stew with greens). But Jagua closed her eyes and shut her nostrils with her town. (pp.108-9)

The above description is of the tenements in Central Lagos. It is at the end of the novel when Jagua realises that for her “Lagos is a failure” that the novelist gives a description of the seam sides of Lagos. For fear of her life menaced by political thugs who suspect her of complicity with Uncle Tawio who has stolen party funds, Jagua flees under cover of darkness from her well-furnished room in Central Lagos to the outskirts of the city where her friend Rosa lives. The description of this part of the setting, the last bog that Jagua is mired in before her escape to the countryside turns up in the following passage:

Jagua followed Rosa to the outskirts of Lagos, to the slum of slums, a part of the city which she had often heard of, but had never visited. (...) Filth was scattered everywhere in the surroundings. (...) Jagua looked at the degradation. Bare floor which came off in powdery puffs if you rubbed your foot too hard. The bed was in the same room, wooden, with a mattress stuffed with the kind of grass cut by prisoners at the racecourse. (p.165)

In short there is no indication whatever in Ekwensi’s novel of fixed forms of nature like the “green pastoral landscape” that has allowed Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” to return to the “din of towns and cities”. The split between city and country defeats any synthesis and the only way for redemption is fleeing from it into the innocence of the countryside.

There is a basic problem in the antithetical relationship that Ekwensi establishes between city life and women. It is only women characters that are packed back to the countryside at the end of his novel. Just a few months after the return of Jagua to her home town she is followed by her friend Rosa. The drift of the narrative points out that female characters have a basic innocence that make them incompatible with urban experience.

It is innocence that makes Jagua leave the countryside in pursuit of a dream of less humdrum life in the city. And this innocence stays with her throughout the novel. Symbolic of this basic innocence are her repeated bursts of emotion at the airport when Freddie waits for his flight to London; when she visits her village after a ten-year absence in the city; when she unintentionally does a mischief and is found out; when she discovers Freddie has married the daughter of her friend Nancy and that “all her friendship in Freddie’s absence were inadequate. Dennis, though young, was not substitute for Freddie”. She even cries herself to sleep “out sheer gratitude” on the night she has found so many wads of notes in late Uncle Taiwo’s bag trusted to her just before the announcement of his loss of elections in Lagos.

Jagua’s steadfastly is viewed as an infantile woman with no intellectual bent of mind. What she is proud of is her body. Hence, once when she went with her boy friend Freddie to a lecture in the British Council, she felt bored because to her all “lecturers were the same: boring”. (p.8) It is made clear that if Jagua is bored even by lectures bearing such weighty titles as “*Some Personal Recollections on the Passing of White Imperialism in Nigeria*”(p.10), it is because she does not even have the intellectual calibre to “catch the jokes”(11) with which lecturers often intersperse their lectures. She feels that she does not belong to the group of intellectuals, and she feels even hurt that only “few eyes followed her wiggle” when she has left the lecture hall.

Ekwensi has also a very unstable character. She is often seized by violent fits of temper and is impulsive in her actions. At one moment she is violent and crazy and at another moment grows calm and repentant. Margaret Lawrence, one of the first critics of Ekwensi's novel writes that "with her contradictory moods (...) she is able to bring off small triumphs splendidly, but she's never able to sort her own life." (Lawrence Margaret, 1968:157).

The innocence with which Ekwensi invests his heroine accommodates well the easy way with which Jagua burns men on the hot pot of her flesh. Hence, in any circumstance she checks the power of her femaleness over the males. Either in the *Tropicana* or in the street male eyes, she knows, follow the wiggle of her hips. With her bared shoulder, her make-up, her mincing gait and luminescent bra, she knows how to display her wares professionally. With the sensual feeling creeping out of her, she can even bewitch an angry man into a lover and seduce him with her silken and voluptuous lips.

She checks the power of her femaleness even in the countryside. For example, she has managed to put an end to an old feud between Bagana and Krinameh that has flared up during her stay in the Niger Delta as a result of the capture of Nancy who has strayed into the waters of the Bagana while fighting with Jagua. Singled-handed, with her body as her sole weapon, she has dressed up herself to kill and has had herself canoed to Krinameth to discuss with the provincial chief Ofubara over the release of Nancy whose capture is blamed on her. In less than twenty-four hours, she has seduced the implacable chief of Krineme into liberating Nancy and into accepting reunification with Bagana from which it has seceded as a result of a succession controversy.

It should be reminded that the victory of Jagua takes place within the context of her rivalry with Nancy. It is a rivalry that involves body politics. Each of the two heroines are there to check the power of their femaleness over the provincials after Jagua has definitely won the contest in the city. The success of Jagua in bringing back Nancy and peace to Bagana is such that it overshadows the success that Nancy has achieved in tribal dance. The news went round that a great thing had happened that a woman (Jagua) from another land had brought with her the good luck they had prayed for all the time(...) Jagua beamed with(...) her victory in bringing the two feuding villages together was far greater than Nancy's mastery of the Bagana dance. (p.97)

Ekwensi has dwelt lengthily on the ways that Jagua has used to seduce the provincial chief. For one thing, "Jagua knew exactly the type of man she was dealing with: a Provincial, who was more readily infatuated with the idea of Lagos, of the *Tropicana*-type woman than the woman herself". (p.93-4) All through the novel Ekwensi draws the parallel between Jagua and the city of Lagos. Chief Ofubara's infatuation with Jagua is similar to the hold that cities generally exert on provincials. As a pure product of Lagos she also fascinates him with her Lagosian democratic spirit. She is quick in guessing that "none of (chief Ofubara's three) wives would dare talk to him as an equal: " – come lay down chief, you never satisfy me. I hungry for your own love" (p.95).

Chief Ofubara has never experienced free love with his three women. He is described as a disappointed husband. His wives obey his beck and call, but to all evidence they are all of them

like asexual “angels” in the palace lacking refinement and displaying an emotional and physical insipidity that have made of the chief a disillusioned husband, an “outcast” as Jagua calls him. In contract with ofubara’s wives, Jagua is a sexualised female who

could see that he (the chief) had never experienced the sensation of African woman as equal. Jagua treated him as she would treat a brother or a precocious lover in modern Lagos. Her glance stripped him of his title and he became a man lusting after her; her temper made him her slave, willing to obey her maddest whims merely to restore the smile on her lips. (p.101)

As a sexualised female established herself as priestess, a “queen” who has established her dominion over the chief, who symbolically surrenders his manhood to her in the form of two bundles containing the money of the pride price paid to her by chief Ofubara. Ofubara pays her bride price but “she knew she could never really abandon her past life and settle down with someone like Chief Ofubara in a village like krinameh. **But the money could come in useful. She reached out her hand and clasped the two bundles**”. (p.95, emphasis mine).

It follows from the discussion above that the setting in Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* is patterned on the archetypal city-country clash. The heroine’s movement between the city and country is represented in a polar structure of imagery. The city is represented in a demonic imagery whereas the country is associated with an apocalyptic imagery. City vice and corruptive experience contrast with rusticity and innocence. The anti-feminist bias of the novel shows in the fact that no male characters return to the countryside to resource themselves. It all seems as if only innocent women like Jagua are prone to corruption and therefore should be kept protected in the villages against the modern styles of life characteristic of the city.

Though Jagua has left the country for the city, some sense of catharsis pulls her back to village life. It is in her village that her “lapsed soul” regains its purity. There she works and thrives, buying a sewing machine, then a bicycle; there she bears a child, crashing the brand of barrenness; at the end of the novel she makes a miscarriage but as Ekwensi shows in his sequel to his novel bearing the suggestive title *Jagua Nana’s Daughter* (1986) she has managed to marry with a country man and to have children. Above all, it is in the countryside that the fabulous fortune in Uncle Taiwo’s bag is revealed to her, after which Jagua has made the resolution to set herself up as a Merchant Princess.

Hence, urban and rural settings in Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* are divided on gender lines, with the country reserved for women and the city for men. This gendered division of space confines women to traditional roles leaving the conquest of urban spaces for men to map out for their own convenience. The discourse of the novel about space in Ekwensi’s novel may seem to be innocent. Yet at the eve of the Nigerian Independence, it can only be interpreted, to paraphrase Michel Foucault in another, as an indication of “tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organisations of domains which could well make up a sort of (gender) geopolitics” for independent Nigeria. (Foucault Michel, 1980:77)

*Jagua Nana* is not the only novel by Ekwensi to have a woman as a central character. His 1966 novel *Iska* also deals with the experience of a woman called Filia Enu. Filia Enu, just like Jagua Nana, issues from a religious background in the countryside. However, unlike the latter,



she is an educated girl. She has studied up to class V in a convent. In this respect, she reminds the reader of Elina in *The People of the City*, a novel written ten years earlier than *Iska*. Elina is a rural girl who has followed her education in a countryside convent just as Filia Enu has done. She is also promised, according to Ibo customs, to Amusa Sango the hero of Ekwensi's novel.

There are enough details in *The People of the City* and *Iska* to suggest that the latter can be read as a sequel to the former. The following are the most pertinent. First, in the first novel, Sango Amusa to whom Elina is promised before his settlement in the city, just to keep him away from other women in the city, finds his fiancée, after having lived for some time there, not desirable. During one of his visits to her in the convent, Sango "cursed himself for his city background which had taught him to appreciate the voluptuous, the sensual, the sophisticated in women". (p.61) The curse launched against the city is due to the fact that it has alienated him from Elina described as "pure", "innocent", "a virgin" "brought up according to the laws of God and the church, unadulterated and therefore ignorant of the realities of life, looking forward to a life divine with him (Sango Amusa)". (p.61)

At the moment that Amusa Sango has made the above curse, he is still in the process of making up his mind about the place from which he will marry. Right from the start of the novel, the question that he poses himself is why husbands recurrently beat their wives in the city. The question takes one hundred and twenty pages to be answered. The hero has learned about it the hard way, it seems, because he has involved himself with a girl, called Aina, who has turned out to be a thief. Aina is jailed and comes out from jail only to be an accomplice of her "witch" mother in blackmailing him out of the little money that he makes as a crime reporter for *The West African Sensation*.

At the end of the novel, Samua Sango resorts to the same violence that he has seen husbands apply to their women. In a fit of ill-temper caused by another of Aina's attempt to blackmail him with an accusation of pregnancy, he beats her to the point of miscarriage. The story-line is woven in such way that it reads as a justification for the violence applied by men to women in the novel. The moral is that women make monsters of their good and generous husbands. All through the novel, Sango is shown as taking care of Aina. He pays her visits even when she is in prison for shoplifting, without caring as to the consequences this might have had on his reputation.

The episode of Sango beating Aina also reads as a signal that the former has finally made up his mind as the type of girl he will marry. He has come in contact with another woman called Beatrice II. Contrary to the other that this inveterate bachelor has known, Beatrice II is daughter of an ex-Dahomean chief who elected residence in the city of Lagos. To all evidence, Beatrice II is a woman of the city coming from an aristocratic stock, and with a firm educational background that makes her less prone to the artificial side of urban life. Unlike the other women in the novel, she does not seek to flee the country, of which she keeps dreaming while living in the city.

Sango's marital choice has made him put an end to his engagement to Aina, the convent girl from the countryside, who has accompanied his ailing mother and his mother-in-law to the city. Things have not turned out as Sango's mother has expected because the hero has definitely

made up his mind about his marriage to Beatrice II. No long after his mother's death in the hospital, he marries Beatrice II and packs Aina back to the countryside. This packing back is sustained in the novel by the claim that "this city is no good for a girl so young unless, of course, she has a husband". (p.111) Hence mother and daughter (Aina) have caught "the first train to the Eastern Greens" in the same day that Sango and Beatrice have celebrated their wedding. During this wedding "Sango wondered ...what it would have been like to see Elina sitting at a sewing-machine in that room with the lace curtains, idly making a dress while around her sat her friends, sipping lime-juice and eating chicken, a mixture of bashfulness , joy and sorrow".(p.119)

In *Iska* , Ekwensi seems to have decide to take up the thread of Aina's story again where he has left in *The People of the City*. Filia Enu/ Aina, no longer seems to be content with her life as Sango has imagined it for her, she falls in love with a Hausa man and marries him against the wishes of both families. Right from the beginning of the novel, she decides to do things for herself without relying on others to steer her individual life. Unlike Aina, she does not let her mother arrange her own marriage. She protests vehemently when her mother has accepted the wine that traditionally accompanies the ritual asking for the hand of a maiden:

Carry all this away, away at once. I don't want it. I'm not marrying Nafotin. I don't want him. I'm already married. (...) His name is Dan Kaybi (...) He isn't an Ibo man. But he is good man. He is the man I love. (p.62)

Accordingly Enu Filia marries the man she loves in spite of protests from both families.

However, tribal realities have caught up with her in Ogabu in the North of Nigeria because Dan Kaybi has been killed in a tribal riot involving Ibos and Hausas. Unable to live her individual life freely and independently in a small village where tribal prejudice reigns supreme she thinks about leaving for the city considered as the site of individual freedom because of the anonymity it provides. The dialectic of country and city in relation to individual freedom crops up in the following quote: "there was no question of remaining here in Ogabu. She must move forward, away from the confines of this small-scale village, into the city where anonymity reigned supreme". (p.56)

The motivation for moving into the city as the locus of individual freedom is more logical in the case of Filia Enu than that of Jagua Nana. Jagua moves into the city more out of fascination with the modern way of life characteristic of the city than out of sociological necessity. Fili Enu has married an Hausa breaking taboos against inter-tribal marriage and thus has no alternative left to her as to her return to her mother's home or her integration into her in-laws' home. As to her living alone in a small village, it is practically impossible because rural mentality does not accept it. The city, therefore, is the last place left for her as a way out of her dilemma.

By taking Filia Enu into the city. Ekwensi presents the reader another case of what African woman do with their freedom once there. The case of Filia Enu is different from that of other women like Jagua in the novel of the same name, or Aina and Beatrice I in *The People of the City*. It is different because Filia Enu is an educated woman from St Monica's convent. This difference in educational background explains why Enu Filia does not rashly gives herself up to city ways. Once there she realises "what a very different place Lagos was from St Monica's. (...) Here it seemed essential that men and women must continue to plunge headlong into disaster- at

every turn of the road”.(p.124) Against this modern unrest, Enu Filia sets the innocence and purity that has characterised her childhood experience in the country and St Monica’s convent.

What is important to remark about Ekwensi’s *Iska* is the antithetical introduction of two female characters: Remi, a “glamourite” given up soul and body to city life and Enu Filia who is nostalgic of the countryside even when she continues to earn her living in the same city. Remi and Enu Filia are friends, and it through their discussions that the author voices what he considers the loss of direction for women cut loose from the certainties of village life. For example, Remi expresses her loss of direction in the city by considering the question of marriage, which in the rural context, is regarded as nearly the royal way to fulfilment for woman:

In modern Africa marriage is no longer easy. The control by the elders, the control by taboos and society, all these have been lifted. Young couples are looking for roots. There are none. So what do you do? I don’t think I shall marry. The more I think of it, the surer I am. I don’t think I shall ever marry. It’s too difficult. (p.92)

For Remi, the quest for freedom in the city becomes a real problem because the only relationship that she has managed to establish with men is that of mistress “a good-time girl” to a director of a public corporation. As such she forfeits her freedom by trading off her body for jewellery and fashionable clothes.

The case of Enu Filia is no less problematic. She has come to “Lagos, to find work and live there for a time. May be from there (she) can go to the United States for further education”. ( Indeed, she has established herself doing “modelling and commercials”. Her salaries do not set her up economically above Remi, but she resists the latter’s proposal to be a concubine to wealthy men: “I cannot join you because I do not go with men like that. I was married once, you know(...) properly (...) What is the sense of this “going out” every night”. (p.70)The refusal to be a “good-time” girl is even more categorical when she dismisses the same Nafotim whom she has refused as a husband in the country and who wants her as a mistress in the city. She deflates his proposal as follows:

I’m quite happy. I stay with my mother, I do my modelling and commercials... You men in politics think you can get just any girl you fancy. (...) You think once you have money and position every woman is yours! Well, you’re mistaken. (p.193)

The above quotation is the closest that Ekwensi comes to a feminist position in all his novels. Its importance comes from the shifting representation of wealth and women. For once, a woman emerges as a centre of morality.

### Notes and References

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