

WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE PLIGHT OF FELLOW WOMEN IN THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE : AN APPROACH TO IFEOMA CHINWUBA'S *AFRICAN ROMANCE : POETRY IN DIALOGUE* (2013)

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Abstract

This article investigates women's responsibility in the plight of their fellow women in the marital institution as depicted in *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*(2013) by the Nigerian authoress, Ifeoma Chinwuba. The selected poetry portrays and exhibits scenes through which readers perceive women's roles in the predicaments of fellow women in the institution of marriage. This romance poetry that violates classical norms in the writing of poetry, particularly lays emphasis on the plight contemporary african women undergo after marriage. That plight of women caused by fellow women under different forms becomes interesting to probe. Interestingly enough, same-sex gender-related issues in the institution of marriage attract the feminist reader's attention since Chinwuba exhibits women's suffering in marriage as caused by fellow women. The main point of this study is to highlight and examine the aesthetics used by Chinwuba to articulate women's roles in the plight of fellow women in the institution of marriage and the narrative strategies used for this purpose. Major findings are that women suffer from men's infidelity caused unfortunately by women themselves to put fellow women in a sad marital situation. Women's old age contributes to their plight in marriage. Though most feminists promote the liberation of women from male hegemony, this essay argues that feminism should be used to draw women's attention on the necessity of sisterhood among them so as to minimize their continued perpetual plight in patriarchal societies.

Keywords : The plight of women, marriage, gender issues, feminism.

Résumé

Cet article étudie la responsabilité des femmes dans la détresse de leurs congénères dans l'institution du mariage telle qu'elle est décrite dans *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue* (2013) de l'auteur nigérian, Ifeoma Chinwuba. La poésie sélectionnée dépeint et expose des scènes à travers lesquelles les lecteurs perçoivent le rôle des femmes dans les difficultés de leurs congénères dans l'institution du mariage. Cette poésie romantique, qui viole les normes classiques de l'écriture de la poésie, met particulièrement l'accent sur la situation critique des femmes africaines contemporaines après le mariage. La détresse des femmes causée par leurs semblables sous différentes formes devient intéressante à étudier. Il est intéressant de noter que les questions de genre liées au même sexe dans l'institution du mariage attirent l'attention du lecteur féministe puisque Chinwuba montre que la souffrance des femmes dans le mariage est causée par leurs semblables. Le point principal de cette étude est de mettre en évidence et d'examiner l'esthétique utilisée par Chinwuba pour articuler les rôles des femmes dans la détresse des autres femmes dans l'institution du mariage et les stratégies

narratives utilisées à cette fin. Les principales conclusions sont les suivantes : les femmes souffrent de l'infidélité des hommes, malheureusement causée par les femmes elles-mêmes ce qui place les autres femmes dans une triste situation conjugale. La vieillesse des femmes contribue à leur situation difficile dans le mariage. Bien que la plupart des féministes encouragent la libération des femmes de l'hégémonie masculine, cet essai soutient que le féminisme devrait être utilisé pour attirer l'attention des femmes sur la nécessité de la solidarité entre elles-mêmes afin de minimiser leur perpétuelle souffrance dans les sociétés patriarcales.

Mots clés : Situation critique des femmes, le mariage, questions de genre, féminisme.

Introduction

While reading Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue* (2013), any feminist reader will be amazed by one major fact : the role of contemporary african women in the plight of fellow women in the marital life. *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, depicts the predicaments of women in Northern Nigeria particularly under patriarchal hegemony. Women who should sympathise with other women in the struggle for the feminine independence from patriarchal yokes, create impossible and sad situations to fellow married women by intruding in marriages to bring about division and marital instability. The topicality of the phenomenon dealt with in *African Romance*, resonates in present-day african societies.

However, few studies have been published on contemporary african women's roles in the plight of fellow women within the marriage and even less about Chinwuba's poetry and despite the fact that women make their fellows have nightmares in their marital homes. This issue which seems to have escaped most feminist readers of african literature is perceptible in the romance poetry of Chinwuba and needs therefore to be highlighted. Most often, feminist critics have put emphasis on husbands' irresponsibilities to justify the plight of married women leaving therefore aside the role a woman can play in the plight of her fellow married woman. Most feminist criticism failed therefore to take into account women' responsibility in the marital predicaments of their fellows. This article does not intend to say that men share no responsibility in women's plight in marriage but its main focus is about the share of women in the marital predicaments of fellow women. Therefore, the title of this research essay reflects its limited scope.

In her article entitled, "Abandonment in Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance: Poetry in Dialogue*", Oshodi A. (2021 : paragr.3) observes that : "The poetry narrative is divided into three parts with the poet persona calling attention to her plight while the second part shows the response from her philandering husband in his self-defence and the third part being the neighbours as witnesses". Mallama, the major persona of the poem, actually calls readers' attention to her plight as it is mostly caused by her fellow women who accept advances of already married men. In the poem, Mallama calls for her sisters' consciousness to the plight in which they push fellow women. In fact, rare are previous scholarships that have discussed women as being the root cause of fellow women's sufferings both psychologically and sexually as well. In "Human Trafficking and Gender in *Merchants of Flesh* by

Ifeoma Chinwuba”, Adi T. and Anate H. (2018 : 177) comment Phylis Chesler’s *Woman’s Inhumanity to Fellow Woman* :

In this perspective, P. Chesler maintains that ‘a profound silence prevailed about woman’s inhumanity to woman...because male violence is so much more overwhelming, threatening, and visible, woman-on-woman violence... did not seem as important’. In her critical work, *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman*, P. Chesler demonstrates how aggressive and oppressive women are to women with a special emphasis on how ‘They judge harshly, hold grudges, gossip, exclude, and disconnect from other women’. Chesler pays particular attention to the mother-daughter relationship. Our article therefore prolongs the study to uncover silence about the use of sex slave trade by women against other women in *Merchants of Flesh*.

While Phylis Chesler as quoted by Adi T. and Anate H., notes a profound silence that prevails about woman’s inhumanity to woman in terms of woman-on-woman violence, this article uncovers silence about women’s roles in the sufferings of fellow women in the married life. In this perspective, Chukwuma H. (1994: ix) recommends that feminism should seek “to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being”. This gives credence to this article which otherwise promotes the use of feminism to reinforce sisterhood among women in such a way that women no longer be sources of fellow women’s plight for, as the saying goes, union is strength.

Indeed, while most of the literature which addresses the issue of married women focuses on patriarchal yokes that submit women within marriages, some authors among whom Ifeoma Chinwuba, provides a contrastive perspective hitherto taken for granted. Women in this romance poetry, are the cause of fellow women’ plight in the institution of marriage, to paraphrase Rich A. (1995). Moreover, in *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman : A Fictionalised Reading of Buchi Emecheta’s The Slave Girl and Ifeoma Chinwuba’s Merchants of Flesh*, Batoura D. S. (2022 : iv), shows “an evil within women who fight for gender equality and equity”. In this sense, he demonstrates “that women are the source of their own misfortune. The work aims at disclosing the inhumanity of woman to woman and tries to compel women into retrospection for their safeguard and happiness” (Idem.). In his work, Batoura discussed many forms of woman’s inhumanity to fellow woman but has been escaped by the other form of the inhumanity of women for other women : giving thought-provoking plights for fellow married women. This issue looms evident in Chinwuba’s *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*. This article maps and examines different forms of women’ roles in the plight of fellow women as portrayed by the poetess Chinwuba. It seeks to broaden the scope of the research of same-sex (woman vs woman) gender relations in the framework of marital life in african literature. Feminism and reader-oriented theories are the theoretical frameworks sustaining my analysis in this article. For Ogin E. (1996 : 11), feminism is a “social movement” which “advocates equality of both sexes and it is widely known as women liberation or women’s rights movement”. The reader-oriented theory sustains that in a text, the reader and the text share a transactional experience (Bresler C., 2011 :72). This study is based on textual analysis of the selected poetry. The article is

structured around two major sections. Section one discusses women' responsibility in husbands' infidelity and section two examines old age as a reason for wives' predicaments in marriage.

1. Women' Responsibility in Husbands' Infidelity in Marriage in *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*

One of the major problems destabilising married life in Africa is the blatant infidelity of husbands. Infidelity undermines the very foundation of marriage in many ways. It causes heartbreak and devastation, loneliness, feelings of betrayal, and confusion to one or both spouses in a marriage. This is by far a common cross contemporary married women bear on a daily basis because patriarchy even blesses men' infidelity which appears to be normal and unquestionable. A woman who dares to question her husband's unfaithfulness is mostly labelled un subordinate and is even threatened to divorce. However, it is patriarchally established that a married woman is strictly forbidden to have an affair outside her household. Commenting this situation ; Stelboun J. (1999 : 43) says : "In a patriarchal society, marriage and female fidelity are requirements for heterosexual relationships". Female fidelity within the matrimonial home is a social dictat and most married women conform to that principle. What brings headaches in the marital institution is husbands' exaggerated infidelity.

Once married, women complain on a daily basis about the infidelity of their husbands because most of the time, this practice makes them be irresponsible. But, who plots with the married man against the married woman who suffers from her husband's infidelity? It appears in Chinwuba's *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue* that it is often women or young girls who accept man's advances though they know the former's marital statuts or even pushes him to stay away from his wife and children. This situation weigths heavily on many married women in contemporary Africa for whom our article wishes to speak. The woman is the direct victim of man's infidelity on several levels. First of all, the management of the children is mostly the responsibility of the woman, who often has no means, while the man plays the richest with another girl who remains indifferent to the pains she causes to a fellow woman in the home. What is amazing is that the same women and girls plotting against fellow married women once they get married become extremely jealous and can do everything possible to prevent the man from bringing home another wife. It is therefore obvious that it is the woman who, by accepting the advances of the married man, pushes him to abandon his family. By so doing, women become complices in the marital plight of fellow women. In this logic, Finlay S. J. and Clarke V. (2003 : 416) in their article "A Marriage of Inconvenience ? Feminist Perspectives on Marriage" maintain that "women are complicit in their own oppression".

In *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, women' marital plight appears under many forms especially husbands' infidelity as endorsed by other women. Consequently, Mallama the major persona in the poem suffers from her husband Mallam's unfaithfulness. The editor of Chinwuba's romance poetry warns readers that : "Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance* is eloquent in dialogue, the intriguing outcome of an estranged relationship. Tormented by a neglecting husband... Taunted by the profligate infidelity of her spouse and the outright ignorance of her kinsmen" (See the cover page of *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*). It is actually Mallama who is introduced to the

readership as a woman suffering from her husband, Mallam's infidelity. There raises the need to probe what is hidden behind Mallam's "profligate infidelity".

By the time we flip through the first pages of *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, we discover how Chinwuba portrays women' and young girls' roles in husbands' infidelity. For this purpose, she firstly introduces readers to a peaceful and model of marital home once enjoyed by Mallama and her husband before it has been invaded by wicked young girls that push Mallam into an irresponsible position. In the following stanza, readers are informed that Mallama and Mallam once enjoyed a happy and united marriage before women and society rob her husband. The coming stanza is illustrative for this purpose :

My husband,
When we came together
Was sweet and kind,
Soft and gentle
Like ripe avocado.
He washed my clothes,
Ironed my wears
He cooked breakfast and,
Served me
In bed.
He wooed me with attention,
Let me to paradise.
He played the strings for me,
Made music in my name
He rushed home to me
After work, ...
I was his video,
His DVD and TVT,
He had eyes for me
Me alone (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 10).

These verses are very telling of the peace, union and mutual love that reigned between Mallam and his wife Mallama. At times like these, Mallama even "swallowed" her husband's words. The poetess Chinwuba portrays a paradisiac life that dominated in Mallam's household at the beginning of their marriage when society and other women have not yet corrupted her husband. This stanza also demonstrates that women mostly are happy when they feel true love and much attention from their husbands. Turned the other way round, they dislike and hate those who dare disturb their marital peace. As such, women dislike fellow women or young girls who disturb marital homes. This issue which till recently suffers the misfortune of being taken for granted, is however a contemporary concern that cripples, on a daily basis, emancipation of married homes with its subsequent consequences such as bad education for children.

He was my cable, my radio,
I swallowed his words

His voice
So velvety and
Tender like palm oil.
I sat by as he ate
My meals mixed with
Plenty of love materials,
With little salt as he liked it
And lots of attention.
While other malingered on the way
In monkey business,
My love hastened to
My embrace,
Led by the scent of
His beloved
He played the guitar for me,
And composed songs
For his sweetheart
For his rabin raina...
He was my lamp, my candle,
He guided me in the ways of love,
And called me Sarauniya.
Sarki na called me Sarauniya
He led me to Paradise,
Then woke me up. (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 11).

These verses come as a support to the popular saying that there is no smoke without fire since the Mallam portrayed here will drastically change to become a poison for Mallama. Mallam, in *African Romance* remains faithful to his wife until another woman lures him into another relationship. He then abandons his wife for a younger one. Females accepting advances of married men have pushed Mallam into infidelity. According to the persona Mallama :

We women are our worst enemies
We see a man
Accounted for,
A man that is wived,
Yet we admit his advances.
We contrive and plot
To divert his attention
From his homestead,
We lure him away
From a sister.
We increase the problems and sorrows
Of the sistren.
E-e-e, we are at fault (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 41-42).

Upon reading this poem, it immediately becomes clear that Mallama complains about the other women's interference in her marital life. She makes the point clear for readers that women are their worst enemies by destroying fellow women's marriages. For her, by accepting an already married man's advances, women "contrive and plot" to "increase the problems and sorrows" of fellow sisters. Mallama's standpoint on male infidelity holds women and girls responsible. It seems that for the persona Mallama, women should refuse advances of already married men to save fellow sisters from marital problems because men do not force them and they are endowed with a will power to refuse or accept male advances. In this perspective, Okpala E. P. & Utoh-Ezeajugh T. C. (2018 : 11) observe that : "Polygamy would have phased out if women could respect the feeling and integrity of their fellow women and as such refuse to accept any marriage offer from an already married man". This would have prevented Mallama from undergoing psychological torture because of her husband's infidelity caused by a fellow woman. Elsewhere, Mallama complains that :

A hawk has verily
Lifted the chick,
On which I relied,
The rod on which I leaned
To stand.
A wild animal has reaped
Where she did not sow,
Ada, Nike, Ngozi, Jummai
Wild animals ?
Hawks
That preyed on my man,
Grabbed him from my lap
And keep him still from me.
Jummai that does not know
The difference between 1 and 7,
Between 6 and 9
Has turned Maigida from me
With sweet nothings.
She has wielded a knife
Into my matrimony
And cut off my mat (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 14).

In fact, Jummai is a young girl and sweetheart of Mallam, Mallama's husband. This relationship she denounces has brought division and misfortune in her marital life. This is an example of how young girls and at times women intrude and destroy matrimonial homes. Commenting this situation E. P. Okpala & T. C. Utoh-Ezeajugh (Idem.) think that : " It is unfortunate, that women themselves, hurt and make the lives of other women painful in marriage". Even though the man is not guilty alone, it may be admitted that the young lady, Jummai, should have refused in order to save the woman at home from marital discomfort because husbands' infidelity shocks and breaks wives' hearts. It is my contention that, in this case the lady should have put herself in the place of Mallam's wife to imagine

how painful it appears to see one's husband unfaithful. The irony most often is that, Jummai once in Mallam's house won't accept to see her husband outside with other women and girls. Mallama's plight here is expressed through verses such as "She has wielded a knife", "Into my matrimony". The pronoun "she" stands for Jummai that knows not "the difference between 1 and 7". Here, Jummai plays an important role in Mallam's infidelity as do many other women and girls out here in real societies. Mojola I. (1977 : 133) sums it: "Every woman who gets married to another married man and every woman who accepts the advances of a married man stands condemned as an oppressor of another, a usurper". In the view of Mojola, the reader may safely charge Jummai and other young ladies who intrude marital homes as being usurpers.

This is a serious plight hitherto taken for granted by african literary critics. Many families have broken apart in the name of infidelity. What shocks the feminist reader is the responsibility of women in fellow women's marital plight. The poetess Chinwuba gives support to the point I am making when she portrays girls such as Ada, Nike, Ngozi, Jummai not only as "wild animals" but also "hawks". This is a real metaphorical imagery in the mind's eye of readers which allows to see how those girls and women wander at random from one man to the other to disturb peaceful families. Such descriptions are illustrative of the authoress's position against women causing marital troubles to fellow women. This is why feminism as seen by Ogini E. (Idem.), should be used to liberate women from fellow women's psychological or physical violence and oppression. Throughout the romance poem under study, the reader sees how Mallama is psychologically tortured by her sad marital instability caused by fellow women. Mallama makes things clear for readers by telling the origin of her marital problems. She points to a girl who "employed her female wiles" to remove the "banner that sheltered her". Through these verses, it is female responsibility in the infidelity of Mallama's husband which is laid bare.

Furthermore, readers are made to see that women use charms and talisman to rob husbands from fellow women. This is a contemporary issue which prevails in modern and globalised societies where materialism dictates its laws. This is the message conveyed by Chinwuba through the following verses :

Jummai may you drink
Of the drug you concoct
To deprive me of my days !
The incantations you whisper,
The wrapping you hide
In the corners of your quarters,
The visits to the marabout,
May they turn to haunt you,
Jummai
In due course !
You have turned Maigida's head
Against me,
Twisted his heart

From me (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 15-16).

In this poem, Mallama charges Jummai for using “incantations” and “marabout” to deprive her of her husbands referred to in the poem as “Maigida”. The verses are clear about female responsibility in husbands’ infidelity through the usage of charm by some younger women. These issues are legion in real life societies where materialism has brought about moral decay. Women as portrayed in these verses fall into the trap of moral decay by striving to use magic against fellow women within the marriage.

The theme of women plotting against fellow women in marriage is depicted when Chinwuba makes Mallam go to his kinsmen mostly female relatives to “seek counsel” (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 17). The verses thus read :

Maigida went to his kinsmen
He went to seek counsel
On our situation.
You need a young girl, they told him,
A lass fresh from infancy
Seeped in domestic feudalism
Who knows only one master,
Her Maigida.
You need a maiden
Fresh like morning dew
Creamy smooth like cow milk
With chests pointing to the sky
We shall ask among our peers for one of such
She will tame Mallama (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 17).

In fact, Mallam complains of sexual weakness and instead of going to a specialist for pieces of advice, he elected to seek advice from his aged Aunty, a woman who unfortunately guides her brother towards infidelity as she tells him to look for a younger girl. It is not by accident that Chinwuba makes Mallam go to her female relatives for advice. It is purposefully done to exhibit how women become sources of fellow women’s unhappiness in marriage as observed by Okpala E. P. & Utoh-Ezeajugh T. C. (Ibid. p.10) : “Who inflicts pain, suffering and humiliation in marriage? Some women humiliate other women more in marriage... Some women play dubious roles in marriage”. Aunty recommends and urges his brother to find a maiden “Fresh like morning dew” and “creamy smooth like cow milk”. Elsewhere in the poem, Mallama complains that :

She found him a girl
On the threshold of puberty
To contest with me
The affections of my husband.
We women are our worst enemies
We see a man accounted for

Yet seek we his affections
Since Jummai entered my house
My life has turned bell-up.
Mallam disregards me... (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 42-43).

This stanza exhibits how women are worst enemies for fellow women. Something the same Aunt, Jummai and other women or young girls will not tolerate to their husbands or anyone looking for girls for their future husbands. But, this is woman nature which this research seeks to highlight. To confirm female's responsibility in husbands' infidelity, Aunt volunteered to ask among her peers for one fresh girl to whom she has already found a mission : to tame Mallama. Mallama therefore accuses Jummai for having robbed her husband :

You have turned my husband's head
Away from his home.
When I talk to him
He snaps at me (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 85).

This stanza makes clear that Jummai plays a key role in Mallam's infidelity and this creates dissatisfaction and mutual hatred in a peaceful household. In describing such scenes, Chinwuba draws readers' attention about how females intrude marital homes to dispossess fellow women of their husbands. In the marital affairs, women have no sympathy for fellow women.

2. Old Age and Wives' Predicaments in Marriage in *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*

It becomes an established fact in Chinwuba's romance poem under study that age plays an important role in women's marital plight. In the poem, old age is a source of misfortune and social rejection for the African woman. The poetess uses the metaphor of the dog and the cat to depict the discomfort which prevails in the household of a polygamist. The issue of old age and its consequences on married women is portrayed in Chinwuba's poetry through the persona of Mallama who suffers competition with younger girls that push her husband into unfaithfulness. These young girls use old age as a reason for Mallam to neglect his wife.

She says I have grown old
Yet my heart is not cold.
Is it a crime to advance in age
When we pray for long life ?
The girls say I have grown old
And my *abunan* is wrinkled and dry
Like starched cloth.
But our husband is even older
His body creased like leather
His one-eyed snake slow
Like an aged caterpillar,
Slow to wake
Quick to sleep (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 14).

In these verses, the poetess depicts the predicaments imposed by old age to the heroine Mallama who reveals one more interesting version of the perception of old age within marriage in african societies. An in-depth analysis of the verse “But our husband is even older” and the other following verses demonstrates that old age is only destructive for women in marriage because they are most often sexually rejected by their husbands. About old age, Mallama laments :

Oh my people !
Age is a curse
For the female specie
A blessing for the male.
A man matures with age
A woman degrades with it.
...
Age is a blessing on a man
On a woman it is cause for pity (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 19-20).

Here, old age is introduced to the reader as a curse for women. The paradox Mallama reveals is how women are accused of old age and at the same time husbands’ old age does not prevent them from attracting young ladies even though we are informed through a methaphor of a one-eyed snake that is slow in waking but quick when it comes to sleep. The methaphor here adresses male sex in old age and the subsequent sexual weakness men suffer from. Unfortunately, men’s old age does attract ladies while women’s old age is a reason for their rejection by men. This is how things are set in society. However, the reader is informed that Mallam only uses the argument of old age to refuse sexual intimacy to his wife Mallama and finds false excuses for this purpose. The following verses are illustrative :

Mallam says he has malaria
Whenever it is my turn
On account of the young girls.
He says his head aches
His temperature high
And he suffers office-related stress,
When it is my day
He turned to the east
And snores till daybreak
When my night comes
While I lie awake and behold
His spineless back.
My mate smirks across the wall,
Waiting for the dawn
And her day to rise
Maigida is tired
And sick and weak
When it is my turn
But come next day

I cannot sleep in
My cold cloths.
He keeps my mate awake
Across the wall
His headache gone,
His malaria cured,
...
I lie awake and listen,
Sleep avoids me
Tears freeze within me (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 15).

Abundant evidence overflows that these verses are mostly about the use of old age in the hands of Chinwuba as a narrative element through which readers discover the true motive for husbands' infidelity and female rejection within a marital home in favour of young girls outside marriage. What strikes readers' attention in this passage is how Mallam plays the tired and the sick to sexually reject his wife and at the same time he spares no effort to exhibit his force, strength and virility with Mallama's younger co-wife. It is probably because Mallama's mate is young and sexually apt that her husband shows interest in her as he even keeps her awake. This sad situation makes Mallama weeps as she resents her exclusion from her husband because of both her age and a fellow woman. For this purpose, Okpala P. & Utoh-Ezeajugh T. C. (Idem.) opine that: "There is nothing as humiliating as when a younger woman displaces an older woman from her matrimonial home". This is very expressive about women's psychological oppression of fellow women to paraphrase Nnaemeka O. (1998 : 137). It is, therefore, relevant to reiterate that *African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue* is replete with scenes that introduce readers to how women cause fellow women's sufferings in a marriage.

For her readership to actually perceive the relevance and centrality of age within marriage institutions, Chinwuba juxtaposes old women and young girls with different appreciations by men. As shown previously in this work, Mallama's troubles are age-based and Jummai and other young ladies' privileged position before their men is linked to age as well. Young aged girls enjoy many advantages from the part of men such as affection, love, sexual intercourse, much attention to mention but a few. On the contrary, the reader is made to see how old aged women in the likes of Mallama suffer all kinds of exclusion and maltreatment in the hands of their husbands. The following verses give credit to my analysis as it validates the reason why men are more interested in young ladies than old women :

Jummai, your breasts
Round like *agbalumo*,
Points up to heaven
Swearing falsely to the sky
Innocent is not your middle name.
...
Jummai, you stand tall like a totem pole
Your backside protudes like the snail's
Your skin is luminous like red oil,

Jummai, your long fingers are lovely to behold (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 17-18).

The portraiture of Jummai in these verses gives readers an image of a very young, attractive and beautiful girl. A valid reason therefore for Mallam to grant her most of his affection and love. Young age means a young body sexually active exactly as Jummai's breasts "points up to heaven" and is "luminous like red oil". The abundant use of comparative terms creates links between Jummai and attractive object to thus show how young and beautiful she is. This is a serious issue most contemporary african women suffer from. Young ladies accepting advances of old and married men who do not hesitate to abandon their marital homes. As laments Mallama, old age becomes problematic because of its unfair connotations for women. It is written in the poem that :

One white hair on a male head
Is debonair and majestic
To be tended and groomed
Oiled and pressed.
On a woman, an abomination,
To be plucked out at once
Lest others follow (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 20).

Here, white hair is another marker of old age. It does not mean the same thing for a man and a woman. For a man, white hair grants him a majestic statue because it seems to attract young ladies while for a woman it is a motive of rejection and some times divorce. It can safely be deduced that old age makes old women no longer attractive while it attracts young ladies in search to reap where they did not toil. Old age for a man means many financial facilities since the whole life has been dedicated to hardwork and search for money. As a result, young ladies prefer old men because of their financial and material ease. This is what psychologically tortures Mallama. It is no exaggeration saying that young age has become a job opportunity for young girls in the likes of Jummai and other portrayed female personae in the poem. To the likes of Jummai both in the fictitious worlds and societies out here, Okpala E. P. & Utoh-Ezeajugh T. C. (Ibid. p.11) warns that : "Any woman who participates in the oppression and misfortune of another woman is evil. Women should co-operate with one another to fight marital disharmony and deprivation. Women should desist from being agents of destabilization and humiliation on fellow women". This is a contemporary challenge for married women who suffer neglect and abandonment from their husbands in search of young girls.

Computer science ignorance as related to old age is portrayed in Chinwuba's selected poetry as a major reason for men's preference of younger ladies. Mallam sees Mallma his wife as too old and not up-to-date as younger ladies that are on facebook and twitter :

Mallam says I do not belong
To the Jet set
That I am analogue
And computer illiterate.

I cannot recognize
A scanner,
I am not on Facebook
Neither do I twitter
I cannot send SMS
Or operate the camera phone (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 45).

Here, readers are equipped with the knowledge that married women once old are accused by their husbands as not being on agender. As a result, they resort to up-to-date younger girls who use Facebook, twitter, selfies, sexy etc to lure men. Furthermore, Chinwuba pictures girls who do not hesitate to congregate on roads, at hotels, aimlessly walk up and down, scantily dressed to expose their wares (*African Romance : Poetry in Dialogue*, 2013 : 46). These are new ways of ladies' dress to attract married men who unfortunately abandon their old wives in favor of the younger ladies. Through these scenes, it a generational clash readers are invited to discover in terms of married life and its challenges.

Conclusion

This article has shown the role of women in the marital plight of fellow women. Firstly, husbands' infidelity has been revealed as one major plight contemporary married women suffer from in their marital homes. Here, I come up with the result that women are mostly responsible for the infidelity of married men under different forms. The study has found out that women especially young ladies resort to marabouts and incantations to deprive fellow women of their husbands. In this logic, the study found that women and young ladies use spirituality against fellow women within marital life just to deprive men from their wives. Most importantly, it has been found that by accepting advances of already married men, women and young ladies push men into unfaithfulness creating and reinforcing therefore male infidelity which leads to marital instability and married women' psychological sufferings in the institution of marriage. Secondly, women' old age has been discussed as a reason for their rejection in the marital home in profit of young girls and women. It has been demonstrated that old age has a double perception for it does not mean the same thing for women and men. While it serves as an alibi for female sexual rejection by husbands, it does serve a key reason for men's infidelity. Men' old age does in paradox attract young ladies while it becomes a reason for female rejection. This is a serious issue most contemporary african women suffer from. Old age in marriage and the use of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsup) have been revealed as contemporary challenges for married women who suffer neglect and abandonment from their husbands in search of younger and sexy girls. This article has found that patriarchy is not the only source of female oppression because women seem to suffer oppression in the hands of fellow women especially in the institurion of marriage. Therefore, the article recommends the use of feminism to reinforce sisterhood among women in such a way that women no longer be sources of fellow women' plight for, as the saying goes, union is strenght. To fight against patriarchal yokes that subjugate women, they should be united and

sympathise with fellow women's marital life and its subsequent difficulties. If women reject their oppression by men, there is no reason for them to be the cause of fellow women's plight and predicaments in any sphere of human life. I suggest union and harmony among women in their struggle against patriarchy. If they exploit and oppress themselves, how should they convince men to stop oppressing them? Therefore, it becomes an urgent necessity to use feminism to save women from the oppressive hands of fellow women.

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