

MARRIAGES AND LOVE IN AFRICA: A DISCOURSE ON WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*

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Abstract

Love is an emotion that nearly everyone has experienced at some time in their life. One would think that with such a familiar concept, researchers would agree on what constitutes love and how to measure it. That has not been the case, yet love is appreciated by all animals, especially the human race. Even though love is universal, it is very difficult to understand it. It is also difficult to explain love from one cultural viewpoint. Consequently, there are so many works that are based on it; yet each person tries to look at it from his/her cultural viewpoint. In this paper, the theme of love is

explored with the aim of discovering the meaning, type and context of love in Africa. Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* is used in examining 'African Love'. At the same time, some other western concepts of love are examined and compared to what obtains in Africa. It is submitted that the type of love practiced in Africa is called Phileo love. This type of love accommodates both polygamy and monogamy.

Keywords: Marriage, Family, Polygamy, Love

Introduction:

It is paramount to categorically state that marriages in Africa are meant for sustenance of families. Family sustenance here goes beyond economy. It also includes sustainable development in the areas of religion, social life, and political activities of the community. Sustainability here therefore means continuity of a practice. In the context of marriage therefore, it means the act of others continuing with a marital relationship even after the death of the original husband. To begin with, this means that, apart from other reasons like love,

- Africans marry so that the new family would count as a new unit in the extended family system that places a high premium on family ties more than on individual's feelings and emotions.
- The couple would have traditional legitimacy for public companionship and partnership in all they do hence co-habitation and friendship between boys and girls is a taboo in most African communities and therefore not allowed outside the marriage institution.
- The couple has the right of procreation that ensures perpetuity of their patriarchal lineage on earth since there is very little room for bastards in Africa.

Within the above premise however lies the concept of love that is precious to all human beings but is expressed strictly within cultural definitions.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

A synopsis

The Lion and the Jewel is a comedy that deals with the rich Yoruba folk material and the impact of the modern on tribal custom. It treats the visit of the white photographer, and the seduction of the village jewel, Sidi by the old Lion, Chief Baroka, The 'Bale' of Ilunjinle who is competing with a village teacher, Lakunle.

The Concept of Love

Love is an emotion that nearly everyone has experienced at some time in their life. One would think that with such a familiar concept, researchers would agree on what constitutes love and how to measure it. That has not been the case.

As a concept, love is appreciated by all animals, especially the human race. As a result of the importance of love to humanity, millions of creative works derive their thematic energy from this emotional notion and experience.

In as much as love is universal, it is very difficult to understand it. It is also difficult to explain love from a one cultural viewpoint. Consequently, there are so many works that are based on it; yet each person tries to look at it from his/her cultural perspective.

Over the centuries, many literary movements had arisen that were mainly focused on the theme of love. One of such is courtly love movement.

Courtly Love was a conception of love, which became a central theme of lyric and epic poetry in France and England. The philosophy of courtly love is made manifest in works like: Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* (12th cent.), Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose* (13th cent.), and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (14th

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cent.). (about.com)

A look at the dictionary definition and synonyms for the word 'love' brings out many words of intimacy such as affection, adoration, worship, be-in-love, devotion, care, irresistibility, keenness, and fondness. This simply means, while to one person, love may mean affection, to another it means worship and yet to another, it is simply a kind of keenness.

Because of the complexity and the importance of love, there are very many attempts at defining and explaining 'love' that are beyond the dictionary which conventionally defines words.

An English man, Erich Fromm in an essay, titled "Erotic Love" describes the most popular concept of love as Erotic love. According to him, erotic love is by its very nature exclusive and not universal; it is also perhaps the most deceptive form of love.

First of all, it is often confused with the explosive experience of 'falling' in love, the sudden collapse of the barriers which existed until that moment between two strangers. But...this experience of sudden intimacy is by its very nature short-lived. After the stranger has become an intimately known person there are no more barriers to be overcome, there is no more sudden closeness to be achieved. The 'loved' person becomes as well known as oneself. (Fromm, 1984, 248)

This type of love is adventure-oriented. Once one's curiosity or appetite has been satisfied, he or she moves to conquer newer virgin territories. But in Africa, with a practice like elopement, it could be argued that even this 'sudden falling in love' (erotic love) is sustained through the involvement of the family in marriage at the end of the day.

Henry Fairlie in his essay, *Lust or Luxuria*, refers to erotic love as lust. He sees continuation as the ultimate ingredient in love but not lust. In his words,

Love has meaning only insofar as it includes the idea of its continuance. Even what we rather glibly call a love affair, if it comes to an end, may continue as a memory that is pleasing in our lives, and we can still renew the sense of privilege and reward of having been allowed to know someone with such intimacy and sharing. But Lust dies at the next dawn and, when it returns in the evening, to search where it may, it is with its own past erased. Love wants to enjoy in other ways the human being whom it has enjoyed in bed. But in the morning Lust is always furtive. It dresses as

mechanically as it undressed, and heads straight for the door, to return to its own solitude (251).

Contrary to the two views above, Katherine Anne Porter strongly recommends romantic love because, according to her, romantic love is changeless, faithful, passionate, and its sole end is to make the two lovers happy.

In as much as romantic love is good, it is worthy of note here that, it is too exclusively private for the African mind which aims at communal or community good. In romantic love, the lovers focus only on each other, excluding every other person. This explains why, the society constitutes itself into obstacles against the lovers in question.

The above description of romantic love sounds like a perfect summary of a comment on the characters of Uloko and Ugwoma in *The Wedlock of the Gods*. Despite their hazards of fate, they loved till death just as the society was also against them till death.

On the other hand, in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, we see commitment in Baroka's lust that quickly turned into romantic love to the extent that there is for continuation. Baroka is carving out a place where Sidi would still be comfortably in love (with another Baroka) even after his death. The question of sustainable love in marriage comes into play here. Because love in Africa is not an exclusively private affair, it leaves some room for the surviving person to still go on living within the family thereby still keeping in touch with the old and familial relationship and ties. This fact is well embedded in the character of Baroka.

Conceptual Clarification

With the above scenario of complex love life, it is paramount to seek an explanation for the reason why some people love so deeply while others are casual about it.

According to Kendra Cherry, psychologists and researchers have proposed a number of different theories of love. The following are the major theories proposed to explain liking, love, and emotional attachment.

From a Greco-Christian point of view, love is classified into three types. These three classifications are based on the degree of intensity.

- *Eros*: This is the root of the English word 'erotic'. Erotic love is sensual love. It has to do with lust. The object of erotic love is therefore sex.
- *Phileo*: *Phileo* is a Greek word that stands for brotherly love. It connotes a relationship that has some blood ties. It is either that the persons or people in *phileo* are related by blood or are ready to sacrifice a whole life for this relationship.

- *Agape*: Agape is unconditional love. It is mainly associated with God. In Greek, it is God that *agape* man. Man has no capacity to *agape* God. That is why the play in words recorded between Jesus and Peter comes into play. Jesus asked Peter, 'Do you *agape* me?' Peter replied, 'I *phileo* you.'

In our text, we shall be looking at love from an African angle, vis-a-vis *Eros*, *Phileo*, and *Agape*. This will also help us to understand why in Africa, most relatives consider one another as brothers and sisters.

African Love versus Foreign Love in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

The play has three parts. It is divided into MORNING, NOON AND NIGHT.

The play opens with Lakunle, the school teacher, courting Sidi with sweet promises and ideas that rather puzzles her. He tells her of her beauty, and what not to do in order to maintain it, like not carrying heavy things on her head and casual dressing. Lakunle puts it this way:

LAKUNLE: You could wear something most modest women do.

But you, no. You must run about naked in the streets. Does it not worry you . . . the bad names, the lewd jokes, the tongue-licking noises which girls, uncovered like you, draw after them?

Lakunle tells Sidi of the beauty of modern love as expressed in cities through easy-life facilities such as electric-pounders, grinding machines..., (5); shares a little of his jealousy concerning Bale's yet unexpressed love for Sidi (5). Their dialogue goes thus:

LAKUNLE: That is all part of what I say. But don't you worry.

In a year or two you will have machines which will do your pounding, which will grind your pepper without it getting in your eyes.

SIDI: O-oh. You really mean to turn the whole world upside down.

LAKUNLE: The world? Oh, that. Well, maybe later. Charity, they say, begins at home.

For now, it is this village I shall turn inside out. Beginning with that crafty rogue, your past master of self-indulgence -- Baroka.

SIDI: Are you still on about the Bale? What has he done to you?

LAKUNLE: He'll find out. Soon enough, I'll let him know.

SIDI: These thoughts of future wonders -- do you buy them or merely go mad and dream of them?

The dialogue above shows Sidi's intelligence which is common with many uneducated village girls. Teacher Lakunle tells Sidi of his need to get married even as he is prepared to fight for change in the society. According to him, everyman must be prepared to fight alone, 'but it helps if he has a woman to stand by him, a woman who...can understand...like you'. It is at this point that Lakunle proposes marriage.

LAKUNLE: Faith. Because I have faith. Oh SIDI, vow to me your own undying love and I will scorn the jibes of these bush minds who know no better. Swear, Sidi, swear you will be my wife and I will stand against earth, heaven, and the nine Hells . . .

SIDI: Now there you go again. One little thing and you must chirrup like a cockatoo.

You talk and talk and deafen me with words which always sound the same and make no meaning. I've told you, and I say it again I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid.

Aha, now you turn away. But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have the full bride-price.

Will you make me a laughing-stock? Well, do as you please. But Sidi will not make Herself a cheap bowl for the village spit.

LAKUNLE: On my head let fall their scorn.

SIDI: They will say I was no virgin that I was forced to sell my shame and marry you without a price.

Sidi as a typical African girl does not believe she should love a person before marriage. To her, her love is meant for a husband. It doesn't matter who she marries. It does not matter who finally takes her. The important thing here is that that person must be a believer in the customs of the land. '...I have told you, and I say it again. I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must be paid...' (7)

Modernity, through the character of Lakunle, may feel that Sidi does not love enough when she insists on payment of bride price. To the African, love between a woman and a man begins in the context of marriage when the bride price is paid. To the African, to have the feeling of love before marriage is immaterial. Once marriage has been contracted, then, together the couple work to develop love. This is *phileo* love (brotherly love). In *phileo*, women love men because they are married to them. It is in this similar vein that when a mother loves

her children, then it follows that she loves all children. Brothers that can trace their blood relationships are bound to love and protect each other etc.

Lakunle condemns the tradition of paying bride price as,

A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated, rejected denounced, accursed, excommunicated, archaic, degrading, humiliating, unspeakable, redundant, retrogressive, remarkable, (and) unpalatable.(7)

Lakunle condemns many things about African marriages: bride price, manual labour, progeny and so on. Instead, he wants a white wedding. He seeks love, a friend in need, an equal partner in his race of life, but not to be forced to 'buy a heifer off the market stall'. He needs a wife that "Together we shall sit at table, not on the floor, and eat. Not with fingers, but with knives and forks, and breakable plates like civilized beings". (8)

Lakunle's love is romantic. He is educated in another's culture but not in his own culture. This type of love, romantic love, requires romantic reception to be successful. Sidi is not ready for this with Lakunle or any body. Lakunle is seeking to please Sidi with the western ideals but Sidi is proudly African, and she believes in the dignity of labour and other African ways.

As they are engrossed in this discussion of their future preferences and world-views and hopes, suddenly, a group of youths, girls, drummers and chants, come in to announce the return of a white photographer that had come to take pictures in the village. They brought a magazine with Sidi's pictures and the Bale. This leads to the re-enactment of the whole visit to the extent that the Bale and Lakunle are conscripted in the play-in-the-play.

Probably motivated by Sidi's pictures in the magazine, Baroka suddenly remembers, 'Yes, yes...it is five full months since last I took a wife...five full months.' Baroka sends Sadiku, by Noon, to go and propose to Sidi for him. Even though Sidi is with Teacher Lakunle, she sees nothing wrong with asking Sadiku to feel free to discuss in his presence. Sadiku presents Baroka's proposal. To this, Sidi refuses. Sadiku tries persuasion by intimating Sidi of 'what a life of bliss awaits her as Bale's last wife.'

This introduces yet another unique African practice in love and marriage where senior wives seek and woo younger ladies for their husbands. This practice deepens inter-wives cooperation in the family, even though eventually, jealousy creeps in, especially when the husband pays more attention to the younger wife and ignores the senior(s). In order to cushion this potential jealousy, younger wives brought in are usually housed with the senior or kept under her care for grooming.

Where this arrangement works well, the younger wife respects the senior even as her mother. The younger wife's children are also taken by the senior wife as her real children. With husband's good family administration, this principle and its practice work well.

Other practices in African marriages and love life are enumerated in the play through the character of Sadiku thus:

SADIKU: Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you?

Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale's last wife? I'll tell you. When he dies -- and that should not be long; even the Lion has to die sometime -- well, when he does, it means that you will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you shall be his favourite. No living in the outhouses for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace; first as the latest bride, and afterwards, as the head of the new harem. . . It is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty-one years.

This statement by Sadiku enumerates concepts that are beneficial to the African wife. Such benefits, according to her include the life of bliss; last wife living in the same house with the husband; senior wife as the head of the harem; the position of the favourite wife and the wife's position in the family even after the death of the husband – inheritance. This is where because of love, a husband that is alive is fully aware that after his death, there is someone that would take care of the wife. Sadiku presents this among the many benefits of African marriages and love.

Such concept implies that love here does not depend on sexual commitment to one individual. It is sometimes in plural-form, such as in polygamy. The fact that a man loves one woman does not mean he cannot love another. The fact that a woman loves a man does not mean she cannot love another man (say, after the death of the previous lover). This explains why wives are adopted or inherited after death of husbands, with the aim of continuing with same family blood and ties. That is why it is said that when a woman is given in marriage, she is not given to one man but the whole family. This is sustainability in the concept of marriage. This type of love is communal love. Someone's wife is collectively called by all male members of that family, 'our wife' even though infidelity is not accepted. Any man at all in the family is called 'my husband' by a woman that is married in the family. *Phileo* is not sensual love but there is sensual love in *phileo*.

This is completely different from EROTIC LOVE where it involves only the two individuals in love. It is

selfishly private. Right from the word go, *Eros* says 'we are compatible, we share the same likes and dislikes, we are a kind; you are tall and beautiful, you look sexy', etc. Teacher Lakunle's love seem more western than African. He has disdain for Sidi's family and culture, likes and dislikes. He prefers to stick to Sidi and exclude the rest of her family members. Lakunle does not even respect the cultural reasons for paying bride-price; instead, he sees it as 'buying' a wife. On the other hand, Sidi sees Lakunle's refusal to pay the bride-price as an abnormal way of expressing love to an African lady, whose self-worth is measured in her bride-price, which involves much more than cash. Bride-price in Africa stands for ultimate sacrifice a man is ready to make for his relationship with his wife. The payment is designed to be spread out as long as the couple live and some other elements of the payment are continued with even after the death of both parents, by the children, so that the family ties are lubricated. This is *Phileo* love in action.

At the end of the day, the play proves the superiority of African love over the western love by demonstrating techniques of courtship by persuasion. When Sadiku takes back the report of Sidi's refusal to marry old Baroka, he suspects Sadiku and decides to get around it through another way. Baroka tricks his senior wife, Sadiku, into believing that he is now impotent. Baroka knows that Sadiku would not keep a secret. According to Baroka's plan, Sadiku would go and disclose this to Sidi who would then agree to come for a private dinner that he has put together in her honour. The idea here is that Sidi would come to torment Baroka thinking he is incapable of having sex. Sadiku, again is sent back at night. This plan succeeds. Sadiku let the cat out of the bag. (33) Sidi enjoys this so much that despite warnings from Lakunle, Sidi visits the Bale in the palace. They start discussing in riddles and proverbs (43-45). Baroka discovers she is very clever above her years and also very intelligent. He brings the idea of putting Sidi's picture on stamps. After that, Baroka proposes to her and she accepts (54). They talk love and finally, she submits herself willingly. She discovers that the old lion is still strong and probably stronger than Teacher Lakunle.

The thesis of the play, from the actions, dialogues and characterization, is the superiority of traditional African culture of love over the western (individualistic) love-culture. Soyinka has used the theme of tradition and modernity in this play to discuss his thesis on love. Through the characters of the Bale, Sadiku and his other wives, Soyinka has presented the bliss in African polygamy; how a single man is able to take and please many wives, how many wives live together and love a single man and how African love in marriage is better

than the western one-wife system theory as advocated by Teacher Lakunle in the play.

To the African the woman's desires must be taken into consideration before proper love is established. If her belief and desire is to fulfil cultural expectations and be a woman that follows what traditions are in vogue, then it is only in the context of giving her what she wants that she could 'be won by those who desire her' (Ekwensi, 5). Sidi believes in her people's traditional ways on marriage.

In context, sensual love instances in polygamy are variously presented in the play thus: Baroka and his young wife in the bedroom (26-27); Sadiku and Baroka in the bedroom (30-31), where Baroka sums it up this way,

...Sango bear witness! These weary feet, have felt the loving hands of much design in women...But thou Sadiku, thy plain unadorned hands encase a sweet sensuality which age will not destroy. *A-ah, Oyayi!* Beyond a doubt Sadiku, thou art the queen of them all (31).

Conclusion

With the above analysis, one can safely conclude that the type of love portrayed in the play and in fact, Africa is PHILEO LOVE. Here, love is brotherly love. One loves a woman either because she is his wife or she is his sister or she is his mother. Conversely, a woman loves a man because he is her husband, brother, father, or her son.

In *The Lion and The Jewel*, we have amply demonstrated that the two lovers, The Bale and Sidi, did not violate the marriage and love system of their culture which takes into cognisance the interests of the unborn (for acceptance in a family), the living (for love, companion and sexual bliss) and the dead (acceptance of the ancestor's ways of doing things).

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