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Colours

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Colours

Abstract

My colour is pink. I do not like the colour pink. I have been made to choose this colour. The colour pink. It is too much a mixture of the red and the white. A watering down of the violence of the red which I have always favoured growing up and out.

her, gives that this was well taught for a Zulu who, independent of him, was writing prose and English composition. These meanings would be involved in his understanding of her British education and her life in England, as well as his relationship with her publishers who were white writers in Harare, by complaining for freely and her examination anxiety. They were the usual manner in which she is being and studying. They had perhaps, a more subtle intention by blaming the success of Zimbabwean men for the political problems in the same way that West African students blame the success of African men. The especially criticise her father and his black wife as well as criticising the black Zimbabwean men she dates, they ignoring the reality that she might have had a life for life, as well as accepting responsibility and themselves as writer/publisher from an oppressive role in her life.

It is also interesting that another article about writing disciplines in Zimbabwe has been published within a academic discourse. 'Apprenticeship of the Future: Gender Inequality in a Township of Harare, Zimbabwe and Beyond' by Sarah Schlegel in *Journal of Gender Studies* that categorised her discipline into groups of writing practices for writing strategy of both and characterises different between the writings of the individual operators with which she was interested in 'Anomalous Myriad in a Post-Zimbabwean Harare, Zimbabwe' by Sarah Schlegel in 'Apprenticeship of the Future: Gender Inequality in a Township of Harare, Zimbabwe' by Sarah Schlegel, *Journal of Gender Studies* 3 (2004), pp. 101-11.

For an article which, in general, writes about the culture of the individual operators of understanding writing practices. A WAY OUT OF HARARE: A WAY INTO HARARE

Guyanese-born Karen King-Aribasala, currently resides in Lagos, Nigeria, where she is a senior lecturer in the Department of English of the University of Lagos. She has travelled widely, having been educated in Guyana, Barbados, Italy, Nigeria and England. She has been writing fiction since the age of eight, and completed her first novel when she was thirteen. Many of her short stories and poems have been published in journals. *Our Wife* is her first complete published work of short stories.

KAREN KING-ARIBISALA

Colours

My colour is pink. I do not like the colour pink. I have been made to choose this colour. The colour pink. It is too much a mixture of the red and the white. A watering down of the violence of the red which I have always favoured growing up and out.

I have always known my colours and painted for my true self, unhampered until now. In my paintings yellow is the colour of the sun. Green is the colour of grass. Blue is the colour of my sky. Black is the colour of my night. In the paintings which I paint of my native Lagos, I never mix the colours with white. I allow them life, my colours, their bold assurance bright. No watering down of the red – which is the colour of my blood – with white.

When I told him this so many months ago when first we met, he laughed with all his perfect teeth. All white. I let his tongue, long and red-wagging, like the butchered red stump of an animal's tail, wag me off my feet. I was paddled with the red long-beating stump of tongue into his pink-mouth-held arguments of precise sounding rational teeth all perfectly shaped and even-chiseled.

Inside his mouth was dark and pink and I looked up at the palette and touched the gums carefully to see if by touching alone his tender parts – I would touch him. But the gums were hard and moist for he had just spoken with the wetness of his red tongue and his white teeth in favour of pink.

My head was stifled, suffocating in his mouth. For although I was not yet with child my stomach protruding proclaiming another me perhaps-a-girl child, I was still too big at that time to comfortably be held in his mouth. My legs which protruded, kicked the air outside his mouth violently and my slippers tickled his mouthstache – a wide bristly hairy thing which my parents said I would get used to in time. After the wedding. And he, my husband-to-be, sneezed. I shot out of his mouth all wet and strangely chaste. I smoothed my hair which was damp with wet moistness from his pink roomed mouth.

At that time I preferred European dress to Nigerian wear and staunchly refused the geles, the bubas and wrappers which my husband-to-be preferred. He said he wanted a woman as wife who though an established painter, well-educated in foreign parts, would not neglect her roots, her

tradition. My constant refusal to wear traditional African dress, my abhorrence of pink was causing him much pain.

And at that time, the time of his courting, I still had the body of will to laugh and to refuse the cavernous mouth of pink and I asked his mouth with white teeth and red tongue a simple 'Why?'

'Why go to my family and ask for my hand in marriage if all he wanted was a woman of pink persuasion?' I was not the woman for him.

These were his words spoken in English to woo from me pink-acceptance: 'My sweet honey love, my Mojinyin. Please be reasonable. You are after all an educated woman, a talented painter. You have to choose a colour for the motif of the traditional engagement ceremony, which may I remind you is more important here in Yoruba land than the Christian wedding.'

I sat numbly thinking of colour. Pure colours I liked. I did not like pink. It is not only the watering down of red. It was the colour which as a baby girl my mother had forced me into. 'Pink' she always said 'is the colour for baby girls and blue is the colour for baby boys.'

I was now a grown woman in my early twenties and I hated pink. 'Seeing as you're so ambivalent, I had better decide for us, for you. It must be all this time you've spent out of Nigeria. You have been brought home to marry me. Emi ni ni ayanmo Emu ni akunle yan e'

He translated the words just to be sure I understood their colour. 'I am your destiny.'

He fingered his mouthstache, twirling the tips with tongue-wet fingers. 'It is my duty as your husband to take care of you, make decisions for you. It is my responsibility.'

'Any colour, any. colour but pink' I said wanly for I was feeling nauseous. He patted the stomach which held our child. 'Don't worry my dear. Everything will soon be settled. Ile oko nile eko... A husband's house is a woman's true school' I shall be your education from now on my dear.'

Again I felt sick, the bile rising in my throat. The feeling must have come from my slight sojourn in his mouth, together with the early morning sickness from the child I was carrying for him. His wife, any wife he had decided to have, would have to prove her fertility, her capability of increasing the clan even before the engagement.

'Did your senior wife object to my choosing the colour of our engagement? No! I chose cream for her. For your sweet self I choose pink. I am now a pink and cream man.'

He laughed loudly. It was true. I had seen the photographs of their engagement ceremony in two hefty albums. Her bouquet was made up of cream roses. Her ashoke was cream and all well-wishers were dressed in well-wishing cream asoke and bubas.

All that occurred so long ago I cannot remember. I have been so sick with this child inside me I have not been able to think and to do much

and to say much to my family or his. I am now dressed in pink. My gele, my buba, my wrapper, my bouquet of roses all pink. And my husband-to-be as soon as the night was over, the dark night black, is also wearing a heavy agbada with pink motifs decorating it.

The many guests are seated under tents in the garden of my husband's family compound and we ourselves sit in two throne-like chairs facing them. To the side of our chairs is the High Table; a long table with a white cloth covering it so. Attached to the cloth with sticky bits of cellotape are tiny paper pink rosettes and pink ribbons. The florist could not find fresh pink flowers at such short notice – my husband and I had debated the pink issue for too long – so he had arranged for a vase of pink plastic flowers, vigorously scrubbed, to be set in the centre of the table. A retinue of aged relatives on both sides of the family were drinking from pink plastic cups and eating from pink plastic dishes and idly thumbing the programmes of the proceedings, which of course had pink letterings on them. My husband to be said that he had had to pay an awful lot of money to have them done up in this way.

It was a fine afternoon, the colours exactly as I would have painted them. The sky blue. The grass green. The sun yellow. My unseen red blood beating in my body with another life. These colours in my palette's eye pulsed stronger than the pink and I smiled at my new husband. He was, after all, a good man and although twenty years older than myself we got along reasonably well. Both our families were quite sure it was a good match. And then there were so many presents which we had received. It would take months to open all of them.

Some were visible. The traditional gifts – Our families had supplied sacks of rice, huge tubers of yam, reams of material, some pink, some not. We received bottles and bottles of alcohol, pots of honey, along with the prayers for our happy married life. I had never attended such a wonderful engagement ceremony and the engagement ceremony was mine. The ceremony would be the talk of the town for weeks to come, months perhaps.

The dancing was in full swing. My husband had at my prompting, arranged for dancers from Calabar to perform for the wedding guests. And there they were, all dancing before us, his mouth, his teeth, his tongue lapping contentment as they swivelled their bodies on green grass, pretending to be boats.

'You see my dear. You can't say I always have my way, There are the Calabar dancers – dancing for you.' He twirled his moustache. 'And I've got another surprise for you.'

As I watched the Calabar dancers I was transported on their heaving boats, their hands grasping paddles, bottom-lurching on river green grass to the thudding sound of the drums of my red blood. They were bare to the waist; on their heads vigorous mountains of miniature trees attempting to touch the sky. Their ankles and wrists jingled with a ringing clasp bell

tinkle. On their hips wide accordion pleated sticking out circular skirts of red, blue, yellow, green, jaunty on their river-grass journey across green grass.

My husband had granted me this gift. After spending years abroad I had told him I had always wanted to see Calabar. The bright colours of their dancing. He had remembered. He had given me this gift.

Everyone was clapping and cheering and my husband laughed and looked at me, winking mischievously. 'Did you see it?' he whispered through his mouthstache.

'The dancing? Thank you so much. I had no idea...'

'No. Not that. Did you see it?' he repeated.

I saw nothing more than what I had seen before, the dancers with colour in movement and sound bright; the tent, the crowd.

I looked up at the sky. Night was fast approaching and the sky was no longer the blue of my paintings. Stretched across the vanishing blue were pointing fingers of cream and rosy pink, the colours skein-threads of light unravelling.

'Did you see it?'

'What? Who?' I asked genuinely perplexed.

He pointed to the far side of the lawn which I hadn't seen because of all the dancing limbs. It was a goat. It was tied to a stake in the ground and it sported a pink ribbon around its neck and it wore a pink chiffon like material draped around its waist. As if it had been a human that is. As if it had had two legs. It had four legs as most goats do and began to defecate in round small black tidy pebbles the way that most goats do. I could not see its tail.

I was looking at the goat and everything seemed to disappear when I saw the goat.

'What is it?' I asked my husband.

'My dear are you alright?'

'What is it?'

'It is a goat. Your goat. My special gift to you.'

'Is it a female goat or a male? I can't tell from here.'

'Of course it's female my dear, are you sure you're feeling alright?' I wasn't. I had a sudden urge to go to the bathroom and excused myself. My husband, all husband, rushed to assist me

'My dear, is it the child? You're feeling ill. Don't worry, it will soon be over. Why, my first wife only suffered morning sickness for a week. Now she has three children and look at her.'

Disengaging myself from his hold I looked at my senior wife also sitting at the High Table. She was, of course, very healthy. She was eating some moin moin, although I couldn't be sure at that distance.

'In the pink!' said my husband pinching my arm. And although I could feel myself being dragged into his mouth-filled rational teeth and wondered if in my pregnant state I would still be able to be sucked into

his mouth. I grabbed the stake to which the goat was tied to prevent myself from moving into the mouth of my now-husband. It wouldn't be right at a traditional ceremony to be inside my husband's mouth in front of all these important wedding guests. The spectacle would be indeed the talk of the town and I didn't want that at my wedding.

The goat had at the back of her a collection of tidy black pebble dung and the pink chiffon accordion of skirt ruffled slightly in the breeze. After a while I could not see any colour at all. In my nauseous state I had been dragged into the pink cavern of my husband's mouth after all. And after all even though the gele scratched the palette of my husband's mouth, I was firmly lodged inside the house of his mouth. I could not get out. I could hear the guests cheering. They clapped. They shouted 'What a good wife!' 'Iyawo!' 'She is now our wife!' 'What a lucky man. She has begun her education. Ile oko nile eko.' 'Your husband's home is your learning place.'

I could not see the night. The night of black. The black solid and pure as I paint and choose to paint with bright colour. The black. The night of black was grey.