



Research Article

Section: Literature, Languages and Criticism



Check for
updates



This article is published by
Royallite Global, Kenya
in the *Research Journal in
Modern Languages and
Literatures*, Volume 3, Issue 2



Article Information

Submitted: 5th May 2022

Accepted: 11th October 2022

Published: 28th November 2022

Additional information is
available at the end of the
article

[https://creativecommons.org/
licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



ISSN: 2709-4324 (Online)

ISSN: 2709-4316 (Print)

To read the paper online,
please scan this QR code:



Discovering the self in Ukamaka Olisakwe's *Ogadinma* (2020)

Faith Ben-Daniels

Department of Languages Education, Akenten Appiah-Menka
University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development,
Ghana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5857-8986>

Abstract

This paper takes a look at Literature's approach in presenting how characters achieve self-discovery by taking an in-depth look at how Ukamaka Olisakwe chronicles a character's journey to self-discovery in her novel, *Ogadinma*. A link is drawn between Sparby & Co's (2019) list of how the true self is defined by connecting four of Sparby and Co's (2019) steps to self-discovery to the plot progression of the novel's protagonist, *Ogadinma*. The discussion attempts to show how literature, be it fiction or non-fiction, reveals the importance of self-discovery in living fulfilled lives as humans. The discussion equally highlights the influence of society and family in one's journey to self-discovery. The paper concludes that the journey to self-discovery is an individual journey that one must make in order to live a fulfilled life.

Keywords: characters, characterization, *Ogadinma*, self, self-discovery, true self

How to Cite:

Ben-Daniels, F. (2022). Discovering the self in Ukamaka Olisakwe's *Ogadinma* (2020). *Research Journal in Modern Languages and Literatures*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.58256/jmll.v3i2.1132>



Introduction

Ogadinma's rape by a respected man who was supposed to help her gain admission into the university, leaves her with an unwanted pregnancy which she disposes off, in order to fulfill her dreams of going to the university to study Literature. But unfortunately, her father discovers what she has done and exiles her from their home in Kano to live with her uncle and his family in Lagos. It is there, in her uncle's home, that she is made to marry her uncle's brother-in-law, Tobe. The marriage dissolves quickly into abuse when her husband loses his company, home and money. In order to save her life, Ogadinma abandons her marriage and baby to carve for herself a new path under her own terms. When the novel ends, Ogadinma is learning from one of Lagos's best hair and make-up stylists and is hoping to be the best in the trade. Ogadinma is hopeful. Her hope comes as a result of the fact that she begins her journey to self-discovery.

Self-discovery is defined by psychologists as the process of realizing who we truly are and accepting and appreciating our capabilities as individuals. Nathaniel Branden (2012) defines self-discovery as a process of first understanding ourselves as humans. And the understanding of ourselves comes as a result of being able to ask ourselves questions like—"where am I going and why?" "what do I want and why?" among many other questions. Branden (2012) According to Branden, in finding answers to these questions and understanding why we give those answers helps us arrive at self-discovery. However, Branden equally makes it clear that self-discovery is not an easy process and does not always bring the answers that we desire. However, it is a key step in understanding who we are as humans. Like Branden, other psychologists have attempted to define and explore the process of self-discovery.

According to Rebecca J. Schlegel & Co. (2009), "a number of philosophical and psychological theories suggest the true self as an important contributor to well-being." (p.1) This suggests that in order to live a full, healthy and meaningful life one must live as true to the inner nature as possible. In fact, Schlegel & Co. (2009) propose that: "the true self serves as a wellspring for meaning by exporting feelings of legitimacy, importance, and value to other aspects of life (relationships, behavior, goals, work, etc.)" (p.4) By this, they imply that in order to achieve success in human relationships, success in the work place, success in achieving goals and building aspirations all emanate from the ability to live a life that is true to the human self. Schlegel & Co. (2009) arrive at the position that in order to live a meaningful life one must live true to the self and they come to this conclusion by using empirical evidence which includes the study of fifty-nine (59) participants "(30 women, 29 men) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Missouri" (p.6) The materials and procedures used to arrive at their conclusion is placed under the subheadings—true, actual self-concept trait lists, meaning in life, psychological need satisfaction, mood, me/not me task. It is under these subheadings that they design a series of questions and tasks for their participants, and per the empirical data received, analyzed and interpreted, come to the conclusion earlier mentioned.

In fact, Schlegel & Co. (2009)'s report reaffirms the existence of self, and the more important existence of a true self which is the mantra to living a fulfilled life. Whereas the study of psychology relies on the use of empirical data to propagate the existence and importance of a true self in order to live a meaningful life, the study of Literature explores the true self through the works of writers who have long observed life and whose writing, intentionally or unintentionally imitates and records human life. And this is what Ben-Daniels (2020) explores as the pressing duty of African writers who instinctively, are not writing for arts sake as Oscar Wilde argued in his essay, *A decay of lying*; (2004) but are writing because they have a duty to their communities not just as entertainers but as historians and grassroots activists. And as such, this paper is not focused on finding the existence of the true self using empirical data analyses. The focus of this paper is on the discovery of the self, using works of literature. In order to

interrogate how literature contributes to the discovery of the self, it is important to understand what the self and consequently the true self is from the view point of psychology. Sparby & Co. (2019) make an attempt to define the self by breaking down their study into the self in to nine explanatory components:

the self is a kind of essence, substance, or a soul that may or may not survive death. The self is the voice of conscience, the source of moral or authentic action. The self is divine, possibly created by God. The self is related to the past, to ancestry, and outward identity such as one's work. The self has a story connected to it that can be represented in a biography. The self provides unity to cognition and experience. The self is a free, autonomous agent. The self is essentially connected to other human beings and culture. The self has to be created. (p.3)

Again, Sparby & Co. (2019) posit that these nine components of self could lead to a 'true self.' They however go on to explain that the 'true self' is a subjective notion because defining true self in a person could be affected by a host of factors ranging from emotional, moral, psychological etc. state at every point in time. In fact, Sparby & Co. (2019) agree to a large extent that the existence of a 'true self' is a complex discourse because: "where does the understanding of what actually counts as being the 'true self' come from? If it comes, for instance, from a totalitarian state, then the "true self" may indeed be a false self since someone other than the self, determines it." (p.3) This argument seeks to posit that the 'true self' will perhaps emerge when an individual finds themselves in a society where they have freedom to do as they please without any sort of restraints. But even in such a free society, Sparby & Co. (2019) describe such freedom as a 'negative freedom' and further delineate on the definition of true self in such a situation. And this is as a result of the inexplicable notion that it is still debatable as to whether the 'true self' that emerges within a free society is actually a 'true self' or the self that has emerged in response to the present situation and circumstances.

Nonetheless, the earlier mentioned nine components by Sparby & Co. (2019) show nine different definitions that come together to help create meaning of what the human self is about. However, for the purpose of this study, the focus will be on four components of the definition of self by Sparby & Co. (2019), and they are: "the self is the voice of conscience, the source of moral or authentic action. The self has a story connected to it that can be represented in a biography. The self is a free, autonomous agent. The self has to be created." (p.3) These four chosen components are going to be used to explain how a female character in the novel, *Ogadinma*, discovers her true self.

However, before this discussion proceeds, this researcher will delineate on the subject matter of self-discovery from a personal point of view. This researcher believes that discovering the self involves finding one's place in the world regardless of the various difficulties life throws at an individual. However, finding one's place is not an easy task. And the difficulty stems from the undeniable fact that societal systems such as economics, culture, religion, moral codes such as family values and belief systems, unplanned situations/circumstances such as sickness, death or one loss or the other, among many other factors, are all at play when it comes to self-discovery. Consequently, people, voluntarily or involuntarily, get swayed from self-discovery. But irrespective of the daunting task involved in self-discovery, one can still discover the self. As such, one way of discovering the self could be through hearing someone speak about their own journey to self-discovery, or even just a word from a billboard or a song or a conversation, and by this, one could come to a sudden realization that something must happen differently in their life and as such, would suddenly make a U-turn that changes their way of thinking and by so doing change their life and lead to self-discovery. Another way of self-discovery could

also be through a situation. Something negative could happen to an individual and that incident would make the individual decide to stand up for himself or herself. And by doing so, people begin to discover themselves, their potentials, and then they find their place in society.

In the afore mentioned ways of discovering the self, it is important to note that the unifying denominator is the gaining of an epiphany. The epiphany serves as some sort of catalyst that propels a person towards self-discovery. Henceforth, this paper will look at how the character, Ogadinma, in the novel discovers her ‘true self.’

Discovering the self in *Ogadinma*

When Ogadinma’s story begins, she has finished writing her university entrance examinations and is hoping to get into the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. However, due to the fact that gaining admission could be difficult as a result of the number of students qualified to enter, Ogadinma’s father believed that they needed the help of someone who knew a powerful staff member at the University of Nigeria. And that someone who could help was Barrister Chima. The responsible order of things would have been that Ogadinma’s father goes with her to see barrister Chima for the first time. But unfortunately, Ogadinma goes alone to introduce herself to a stranger: “a man not much older than her father.” (p.11) By going alone to see barrister Chima on a matter that concerns her further education and future, Ogadinma begins her journey to self-discovery alone. This reinforces the singular notion of self-discovery. Self-discovery is an individual journey. Every person discovers their self alone.

Moreover, with her visit to Barrister Chima’s office, Ogadinma’s story begins. And as Ogadinma’s story unfolds, Sparby & Co.’s (2019) description that ‘the self has a story connected to it that can be represented in a biography’ emerges within the plot. The plot is the unfolding sequence of events is the story. And the story of a person’s life, be it a character of fiction like Ogadinma or even Tomi Obaro’s characters—Funmi, Enitan and Zainab in her novel, *Dele weds Destiny* (2022), or non-fiction characters as in Okey Ndibe’s memoir, *Never look an American in the eye* (2016), (where the reader follows Ndibe’s story of migration from Nigeria to America and how he discovers himself as a father, teacher and husband); as a reader, you discover that by reading these stories, you are following their lives.

Every action or decision taken by any of these characters as the plot of their lives progresses is all part of their journey towards self-discovery. As to whether everyone discovers their true selves or not at the end of their lives is an individual story. And it is this individual story that the character of Ogadinma presents to the reader.

Although the novel is not a biography of any living person, it is the biography of the character, Ogadinma. And although the character, Ogadinma, is a fictitious character, her story, which is in itself, a work of fiction, is still a mirror reflection of life itself. And this is because life itself is presented daily through works of fiction. After all, there is not a single story that has no resemblance to life itself. Regardless of the extent of fiction in any work, happenings of life always find their way in the seams of the plot in one form or the other. For instance, although Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, is a work of fiction, the character of the Editor of the newspaper, Ade Coker, has some resemblance to the real life individual, Dele Giwa, the Nigerian journalist and editor of the newspaper, *Newswatch*, who was assassinated in his home, with a parcel bomb, on 19th October of 1986. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel, her character, Ade Coker is the editor of the newspaper and he dies under similar circumstances in the novel. Another example is Faith Ben-Daniels’ *Mimosa*. The novel talks about how a man, Kobby, after years of joblessness dies on his first day as a worker in the big mart, Mimosa. Although the novel is a work of fiction, the collapse of the big mart, Mimosa, can be likened to the actual

collapse of one of Ghana's biggest chain stores, Melcom, on November 7th of 2012. These examples are an indication that although fiction novels are born out of a writer's imagination, there is always present that element of real-life situations that consciously or unconsciously affect the work. There are instances where one can connect what one reads in novels or watches in motion picture to actual living or dead people.

Similarly, Ogadinma, is treated not just as a fictitious character in a novel. But as a character representation of women who in diverse ways have experienced in real life what this character experiences in the world of the novel. It is based on this connection that real life events and characters have with the world of fiction that Ogadinma is considered a character with a biography just as a living person would have.

Therefore, the events about Ogadinma's life begin with her visit to Barrister Chima. Unfortunately, her meeting with Barrister Chima does not go as expected. And as the writer narrates: "instead he went on to ask questions about her visit: who sent her, who her father was. 'I have never met him,' he said, his tone dismissive. 'I don't know how he got my card.' ...He was in a haste to send her away ..." (p.12) And Ogadinma sensing that the Barrister is about to dismiss her without helping, pleads for his help. Barrister Chima tells her that: "I am going to attend to a desperate client. Will you come back by three, so we can talk about this admission you seek?" (p.12) And when Ogadinma returns at three and Barrister Chima takes her to his house for lunch, she willingly accepts because she does not want to miss her chance of going to one of the best universities in Nigeria. According to the writer, when Barrister Chima begins to sexually defile her:

there was a moment when a scream came to her throat, but she clamped her lips shut. She would be going to the university. She would get into the best university. She would study Literature; all of this would no longer matter. She spoke these words to herself, even when her body stretched and a sharp pain travelled swiftly to her waist. (p.18)

Here, Ogadinma's story, which is a reflection of herself continues to unravel itself. And also, by speaking these words (as seen in quote p.18) to herself, Ogadinma's actions and thoughts reinforce the definition of self which explains that 'the self is the voice of conscience, the source of moral or authentic action.' Ogadinma's conscience is consoled with the words that the trauma her body, psyche and sexuality as a young girl has just received in the hands of Barrister Chima would all fade away with her gaining admission into the University of Nigeria to pursue her dreams. As such, her expectations for the future, expressed through her thoughts authenticates her complicity to being defiled and equally authenticates her reason for realigning her moral values in order to rationalize the action of using sex to gain admission into university. And because the sexual act she endures is a sacrifice towards her future she is eager to ensure that her sacrifice has yielded results. So even though she is supposed to return home, after Barrister Chima calls his brother on the matter of the admission to the university but is unable to reach him, the writer narrates that: "she wanted to stay so that if his brother at the university called back she could listen to their conversation, and she would respond to his questions if he needed more details about her." (p.21) Ogadinma's thoughts, as revealed by the writer supports the often-used cliché, that the end justifies the means. As such, immoral actions are redefined through Ogadinma's actions and thinking. The immoral sexual act between her and barrister Chima is treated as a means to an end. And in order to recover moral grounds, Ogadinma goes to the bathroom when she returns home and: "she scrubbed herself vigorously, every inch of skin, everywhere barrister Chima's hands had touched." (p.22) The act of scrubbing her body suggests that she splits her conscience into two halves. The first

half of her conscience is what rationalizes her need for survival and education and as such propels her into accepting Barrister Chima's sexual defilement of her body. The second half of her conscience is what shames her and judges her actions. And in order to appease this second half of her conscience, she scrubs herself. Scrubbing herself signifies that she still has a conscience that works and still understands the moral concepts of right and wrong. This is why the first meaning attached to conscience is that it tells us right from wrong. However, the very presence of conscience actually reveals who we really are. It shows us the extent to which we can go as humans. It reveals to us our true self. And in Ogadinma's case, this initial action begins to unveil her true self. She begins to discover the extent of what she can endure and accept. And the reader also begins to discover the resilience in Ogadinma's character. And even more so when she checked her calendar and realized that: "a month had passed since she last saw her period." (p.25) She visits the doctor and tells him that: "my period was supposed to be here two months ago. I want it to come out." (p.27) By taking the decision, all by herself, to terminate her pregnancy, Ogadinma aligns with Sparby & Co.'s (2019) assertion that 'the self is a free, autonomous agent.' And this is why regardless of the looming threat her father poses to her person when he returns with: "rattan canes, slim, long sticks bounded together at each end with black rope...and her heart lurched painfully in her chest," (p.31) she still refuses to tell her father who got her pregnant. And this is because she has already made the autonomous decision to forget about the episode with barrister Chima and the loss of her university education. However, by terminating the pregnancy and going alone for the procedure reveals her autonomous self which is determined to return to the track of her educational pursuit.

The pursuit of one's autonomous self does not come from fulfilling dreams or achieving one goal or the other, or even having a wish granted. The autonomous self comes from discovering self within. And this is only possible when one comes to the point of realization that the individual is a complete person with an inbuilt will to survive and excel. However, more often than not, finding this autonomous self could take forever or might never happen. This is because as life progresses, choices are made based on circumstances. And there are times that these choices put aside self-discovery. And in fact, this is what happens to Ogadinma when her father puts her on a bus the next morning, for Lagos. And her father sends her away to stay with his brother, Uncle Ugonna and his family, in Lagos. And Ogadinma soon realizes that she has not been sent to continue her education, but to be married off when Aunt Ngozi, her uncle's wife, comes into her room and tells her to: "come and meet Tobe. 'You can change your dress,' Aunt Ngozi said and left." (p.45) And after their first meeting, there are more meetings and outings with Tobe. And before she realizes it, at seventeen, she is married off to Tobe, a thirty-five-year-old man. By marrying Tobe Ogadinma sways from her path of self-discovery and discovering her autonomous self. Although she initially shows signs of her autonomous self when she terminates her pregnancy in order to go to school, her marriage to Tobe signifies her loss of that self. This equally shows how circumstances of life can derail one's journey to self-discovery. This is an example of the challenges women go through, and especially, a common phenomenon with women of African descent. There is continually a conflict between self and cultural/social beliefs and practices. And more often than not, African women lose their identities while trying to create a balance between self and cultural/social beliefs and practices. For instance, Ben-Daniels (2020) posits that African women continuously struggle to renegotiate their spaces in society by falling heavily on womanist ideas. This is because African womanism exhorts the possibility that African women can function effectively as women and as any other self that they so desire to create for themselves. As such, sending Ogadinma off to Lagos to be married, just because she gets pregnant and aborts the child does not mean that she should be treated only as a woman whose function is to be married, have children and please her husband. If she aspires for more, she should be encouraged to do so. After all, her terminating the pregnancy is a clear

indication that she is focused on achieving her dream of going to the university. And for her father to judge her by this mis-step is a failure on his part to understand the very essence of human frailty.

And Ogadinma's father's inability to disengage his daughter's mis-step from who she truly is the catalyst to Ogadinma's loss of self by marrying Tobe. Because she no longer considers what she wants but what would make her father happy. And by marrying Tobe: "she knew that she had finally brought honor to her father's name." (p.95) But what about her and her dreams? That is not considered in her quest to please her father. And although the marriage begins somewhat peacefully as the writer describes when she writes that: "they had spent the past three days doing nothing but making love and waking up and eating..." (p.101) The marital space soon descends into chaos and violence. And this is marked by two significant events in the plot—the overthrow of the government by another military regime, and the whipping of Ogadinma by a soldier. The government throws Tobe in jail and he returns a changed man. According to the writer, upon Tobe's arrival after being released from jail, Ogadinma found that: "it was too disturbing, looking into the eyes which were familiar but different, which seemed veiled with something somber. He looked subdued." (p.130) By losing his wealth and status, Tobe seemed to have lost what made him hold on to the notion that he was a good husband, a fine gentleman. And in fact, his friend, Kelechi's visit, does more harm than good. Because it is after Kelechi's visit and Ogadinma tells her uncle and his wife about the visit and Kelechi's supposed betrayal of his friend that she receives her first beating from her husband:

she was panting as she climbed the stairs and had just stepped onto the veranda when a hand grabbed her by the neck, pulling her inside and shoving her against the wall. She was thinking, was it Tobe, before he drove his fist into her face, rattling her teeth. There was a sickening snap of cartilage...She opened her mouth to cry out again, but saw his feet driving into her face before she blacked out. (p.141)

After this beating, Ogadinma runs back home to her father. Unfortunately for her, his response is not what she had expected. He tells her:

you think you have endured what others haven't? ... You went outside and brought pregnancy from god-knows-where like Okwy, and killed it under my roof. I forgave you even though that sin was unforgiveable...your aunt, Okwy, got pregnant at home and we gave her away to an old widower. That is what we do to girls who get pregnant at home. But you, I sent to Lagos. What happened with your husband is sad, but it has happened., and it is not a reason to run from your home, you hear me? (p.149)

In fact, Ogadinma's father's response to her beating by her husband, shows a serious lack of concern and love for his daughter. As far as he is concerned, she is a disgraced woman, and she should be grateful for the marriage she has. His response to his daughter also suggests that marriage can equally be used as a form of oppression for women. Proof of this is later witnessed in the novel when Ogadinma abandons her marriage and goes to her aunt, Okwy, for refuge. Okwy's living conditions are deplorable, her marriage to the old widower is a sad story. Therefore, writers such as Forbang-Looh (2021) who take an in-depth look at the African cultural practice of polygamy and delineate on how this marital cultural practice oppresses women, have only looked at the obviously visible form of oppression of African women within the marital space. There is however, other serious forms of oppression within the marital space. And Ogadinma's father's response to his daughter exposes a hidden oppression within

the marital space—forced marriages and the hidden reasons for such marriages. Although Ogadinma is courted by Tobe before marriage and she willingly accepts his marriage proposal, the entire process and marriage was forced upon her. As stated earlier, Ogadinma marries Tobe, not because it is truly what she wants, but to bring honor to her father. Her father's response equally shows how women are treated in the society. They are considered sexual objects which could easily be disposed of if no longer needed. And this is the negative perception that Ben-Daniels (2020) addresses in the discussion on how women are renegotiating their spaces in society under the ideology that African womanism represents. And this ideology posits that yes, African women have a culture and an order within their cultures that they want to uphold, but they equally deserve a level playing field that does not put them at a disadvantage based on their sex. And it is equally for this reason that writers such as Binwell Sinyangwe, in his novel, *A cowrie of hope* (2000), presents the character, Nasula, a woman without formal education, but willing to go every length to fight so that her daughter gets an education. And this is regardless of whatever mistakes or mishaps might happen to her or her daughter. After all, they are human, and regardless of their situation, they must continue living. This is why it becomes sad (as in Ogadinma's case, her sexual encounter with Barrister Chima destroys her dreams) when dogmatic and detrimental societal values and norms are wielded high above human consciousness and weaknesses without taking into consideration the ripple effects later on. In fact, Ogadinma's father, unlike Sinyangwe's character, Nasula, fails as a parent in this regard. He does not look out for his daughter's best interest but reinforces what Ben-Daniels (2021) refers to as the false machismo around fatherhood which presents fatherhood as some sort of 'macho figure' instead of truly being a parent who is nurturing a child. And as such, he fails to see the harm that he has caused his daughter.

As such, the rage Ogadinma feels when her father makes his unfortunate response as earlier quoted, is justified. Although this rage dies off when he consoles her, the very presence of rage signals a struggle of her autonomous self to take over. But unfortunately, she loses her self again when she allows herself to be humiliated by Tobe and Aunt Nyozi when they send her to the spiritual leader, Onye Ekpere, who accuses her of being the cause of her husband's failure in business. She allows herself to be sexually assaulted the second time in her life by Onye Ekpere just so she can return home.

But in order to discover herself, Ogadinma must be pushed by circumstances that will cause her to confront her situation. And the circumstance that causes her to do just that is when Tobe beats her again even though she is heavily pregnant; just because he suspects that she complained about his bad decision making in business to her uncle. The beating caused her to have an emergency caesarean in order to save her and her son. And from that point on, the writer explains that Ogadinma could no longer stand her husband. She becomes disgusted with him. In fact, "she no longer loved him." (p.209)

And with this realization, Ogadinma abandons her marriage, leaving behind her son. And from this point on Ogadinma begins to recreate herself. Her action of leaving her toxic marriage, and recreating herself, falls in line with the fourth definition of self by Sparby & Co. (2019) which posits that the self has to be created. From this point on, every decision Ogadinma makes is geared towards creating herself. This is as a result of the fact that Ogadinma begins to understand herself and understand the trajectory she wants her life to take. And she takes action to change the course of her life. Ogadinma's actions, henceforth is in line with Branden, (1985) who posits that understanding oneself alone does not lead to change, although it is the first step to self-discovery. However, in order to see change and growth in oneself, the individual must take action. And we see Ogadinma taking action by taking charge of her life. Her first action is leaving the marriage, then she gets a place of her own through a friend's help. Even her decision to go to Kelechi for help is a deliberate one. As such, when she feels nervous about her decision and her confidence begins to wane, she remembers the woman she just shared a bus ride with

and how she boldly tells off a man. According to the writer, Ogadinma: “thought about the woman and her boldness. She had not seen the woman’s face clearly, but she remembered the raised shoulders, how she sent the man scurrying away like a wounded rat.” (p.226)

With this testimony fresh on her mind, she boldly walks into Kelechi’s office. By meeting Kelechi and allowing herself to have a sexual relationship with him, Ogadinma recreates herself. Her sexual affair with Kelechi is based on the fact that she has always liked him. And this time around, she initiates a sexual encounter by being the first to kiss him. And by this act, she is no longer a sexual prey. She establishes the fact that as a woman she could equally exercise her sexual will when she needs to. Such a will cannot be the preserve of men. Again, her encounter with Kelechi ensures that she gets the money she needs to set up herself. According to the writer, Kelechi: “enclosed a cheque addressed to her... Now she had the capital she needed to start a trade or pay to learn a craft.” (p.231) Although she makes the money by being Kelechi’s lover, and this makes her feel guilty for a while, “Ogadinma liked the woman that she was becoming.” (p.235) She was gradually growing into a woman who could say no to a man, a woman who could say no to a situation she finds uncomfortable. And she does this to Kelechi when he visits her in Lagos without prior warning. According to the writer, Kelechi’s sudden visit leaves her:

mouth with a sour taste...But now he was standing here with her, kissing her, touching her. She had left what they shared in Aba and had come to Lagos a different person. She did not want to repeat the lust, because that was what it was. And now she did not know how to tell him this without hurting him, how to be true to herself without making yet another daunting sacrifice.” (p.239)

But although all of these thoughts are running in Ogadinma’s mind, she tells Kelechi that: “I don’t want to do this anymore.” (p.239) This statement is a clear indication that Ogadinma has decided to recreate herself. She is creating a true self that she can be proud of. A self that she can live with. And she tells Kelechi that she: “would rather be shot, be done with all of this, than return to that life, ever again.” (p.240) By this statement she makes it clear that she intends to begin a new life on her own terms. She is beginning a journey to live for herself and not under the shadows of anyone else.

Conclusion

The last statement Ogadinma makes to Kelechi (where she says that she would rather ‘be shot than return to that life’) is evidence that she has come full circle as a new woman. Ogadinma’s story is in fact, a literary testimony that the discovery of self is not a clear path. Many issues can lead to discovery and rediscovery of self. But regardless of the concomitant issues surrounding discovering the self, it is an undisputable fact that an individual can only live a fulfilled life if the purpose for that life is found. And in finding the purpose of one’s life, one must discover one’s true self. Ogadinma’s story reveals (as the character, Madea, in Tyler Perry’s movie, *the diary of a mad black woman*, puts it) that ‘life happens.’ And because life continually happens, people discover themselves and rediscover themselves as they go about living their lives the best way that they know how. Moreover, self-discovery would always be an individual journey, an individual story.

References

- Adichie, C. N. (2003). *Purple hibiscus*. Algonquin Books.
- Ben-Daniels, F., Jonathan Essuman, Kingsley B. O. Adu (2020). Defining the African writer's duties-Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *Grave Yard People*. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol 10 (10), doi:10.7176/RHSS/10-10-04
- Ben-Daniels, F. (2015). *Mimosa*. Flozzies Publications.
- Ben-Daniels, F. (2020). Renegotiating the terms of African womanism: Binwell Sinyangwe's *A cowrie of hope* and Neshani Andreas' *the purple violet of oshaantu*. *Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics*, Vol.71, doi: 10.7176/JLLL/71-05
- Ben-Daniels, F. (2021). Who is a father? Deconstructing the machismo of fatherhood in Chigozie Obioma's *the Fishermen* (2015). *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 3(1).
- Branden, N. (2012). *The art of self-discovery. A powerful technique for building self-esteem*. Bantam Books.
- Ejinkonye, U. (2001). *Remembering Dele Giwa*. Thisday Newspaper.
- Forbang-Looh, G. N. (2021). Shifts in polygamous considerations in the African society: A reading of Pepertua Nkamanyang Lola's *the lock on my lips* (2014). *Steadfast Arts and Humanities* 1(1)
- Grant, D. (Director). (2005). *Tyler Perry's Diary of a mad black woman*. (Film). Lionsgate Films. BET Pictures.
- Ndibe, O. (2016). *Never look and American in the eye*. Soho Press.
- Obaro, T. (2022). *Dele weds Destiny*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Olisakwe, U. (2020). *Ogadinma*. Masobe.
- Rebecca, J. S, Joshua A., Laura A. King(2009) Thine own self: true self concept accessibility and meaning in life. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 96(2), p.473-490. doi: 10.1037/a0014060
- Sinyangwe, B. (2000). *A cowrie of hope*. Heinemann.
- Sparby, Terje, F. Edelhauser, Ulrich W. Welger (2019) The true self. Critique, nature and method. *Frontiers in psychology*, Vol 10, article 2250, doi: 10.3389/psyg.2091.02250
- Wilde, O. (2004) first published 1889. *A decay of lying*. Kessinger Publishing.