

they have. Her current boyfriend is younger than she is and earns half her salary. "I have to be both man and woman to take care of the future. I have to be a woman when I sit at the beauty parlour. I have to be a man when I make arrangements to buy a new house. But I'm glad I'm divorced."

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Dr. Joseph Muhangi, a psychiatrist at Kenyatta National Hospital, blames personality conflicts for most divorces.

"Most divorce cases that come my way are due to personality maladjustment," he said in an interview recently. "Rigidity in one spouse—an inability to bend—is a common cause of marital misunderstanding. And there are equal numbers of both sexes who become adamant."

Dr. Muhangi also sees selfishness "which is based on a very egoistical personality" as another cause of divorce, and strongly advocates the principle of give and take in every marriage. "Give and take is an ideal concept," he said, "but very difficult to achieve." He is concerned about divorces which involve children. "Where children are involved, serious consideration must be given to the emotional repercussions. When there is no authority to internalize, children tend to

become psychopathic." But he is also opposed to the Roman Catholic stand of no divorce at all. He believes that divorce is a personal and highly debatable issue in which the people involved should exercise judgement. "It's no good taking the Roman Catholic form of no divorce at all. But it is no good getting a divorce at the stroke of a pen, either. It's between these two extremes that people must find their accommodation."

The rapid increase in divorces has triggered a stream of neuroses among women in Kenya which didn't exist—at least not to the discernible degree—twenty years ago. Alcoholism and drug abuse are on the rise among career women. A divorced woman who suddenly finds herself free to do whatever she wishes without having to compromise may sound enviable to a bed-ragged housewife, but divorce tends to create new problems while solving old ones. There is disillusionment in a divorcee's born-again status, borne out of a realization that personal understanding and personal ability are not what really matter in the end when it comes to success in a modern Kenyan marriage.

Some divorcees, however, are drunk with euphoria after the event, amazed at how painless the new world is, unlike their expectations.

Pamela told us of the relief she felt once she was in her own flat. "It was such a great feeling to be away from the horrible tension that had built up. I would dread the evenings, because we had nothing to say to each other, and all I could experience was hostility. I am not so sure that the break-up of the marriage was all his fault, but the fact remains that for two long years all there was between us was bitterness. We would have ugly fights at least once a fortnight, and in between it was just silence. I felt it was like a prison. But to think of leaving seemed impossible with two children aged 4 and 6. How could I possibly cope, I used to think.

"In the event, it has turned out to be all wonderful. My employer increased my salary and also my lunch break so I could be with the children more. I don't have a big burden hanging over my head all the time. I feel happier and everyone tells me I look better too. I would like to marry again definitely—but it will only be to someone who I am absolutely sure has no old-fashioned ideas about what a woman can do and what she cannot."

Not all breaks are easy, however. A quick social whirl about town in the "free" divorcees' world would soon convince them that having disposed of an oppressive husband is not enough to make life what they thought it would be, and the shock of finding out can result in lost confidence, depression and, in some cases, alcoholism. One such case was Mwikali, a sales executive in Mombasa. She quite candidly admitted that life has been going downhill since she divorced her husband three years ago.

"I was very unhappy with my domineering, short-tempered husband. He refused to take me seriously, and would never seek my opinion or consider my feelings whenever a decision had to be taken which would affect me. I therefore was happy to leave him. But I have been unable to adjust to the single life. I have put on 20 pounds since the divorce, I never cook proper

meals and drink far too much. Basically, I feel no motivation to do anything. I complain myself about being lonely, yet turn away from so many opportunities of friendship that are possible. Even a simple chore like dropping twins to their nursery seems like a burden.

"I would very much like to marry again. I believe in marriage, really, it's just that I don't want a man who will treat me unfairly. But why does one get such a man? Men who usually ask me to have only one thing in mind and when I make clear that I am not interested, they lose interest also. Some men are more sincere, but I have yet to meet a really enlightened one.

"I will tell you one thing though: I do not regret the decision I made about divorcing Paul."

But most of the women I talked to did not want to remarry. Wanjiku has been divorced for twenty years and has the distinction of being one of the first African women to seek divorce in Kenya. During the twenty years she has been divorced she has matured professionally and become a presence in her own right. Her ex-husband was a well-known personality.

"I've had a long time to reconsider my divorce, and I've decided that a nasty woman is as nasty as a nasty man. I also concluded that children must be protected in divorce. But the most important thing I've concluded since I divorced my husband is that African men don't like intelligent women."

Asked whether she planned to remarry, she gave a flat "no."

"Why risk misery a second time? African men will never give you peace if you are intelligent," she concluded. "Until men start treating women like the human individuals they are, it appears that more women will continue to opt out of marriages in favour of divorce. And for the divorced woman in this country, there is at least some comfort in the knowledge that there are growing numbers." —M

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