Childless Mothers and Motherless Children: Fantasies of Postcolonial Reproduction in The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency.


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Abstract:
Mma Ramotswe, the heroine of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels and their adaptations, is proud of "being a traditionally built African lady unlike these terrible stick-like creatures one saw in the advertisements." This crisis of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' erupts in the representation in the novels and television series of Mma Ramotswe's sexuality and mothering, the texts' failures to acknowledge or negotiate the inconsistencies of its deployment of the 'traditional' and the 'modern', dilemma of (national) reproduction when sex is not an option. Further, neither text integrates its explicit celebration of 'traditional values' with the professional opportunities that 'being modern' affords Mma Ramotswe. Attempting to negotiate this disjunction, the texts divest Mma Ramotswe of any 'modern' sexual attitudes or actions - the ones that produce offspring - while still providing her with those fruits: children. Both written and visual representations systematically negate any possibility that might participate in any reproductive activity of her own. A mother without children to children without mothers, Mma Ramotswe figures postcolonial reproduction as a sexless, passionless transaction, while both texts align any sex with the probability of pain, betrayal, and death.

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