

Woman of Resilience in Zambian Male Fiction: A Feminist Reading of Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*

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Abstract – The aim of this paper is to critically analyse Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*, using the lenses of feminist criticism which works for reevaluating the images of woman, and Marxist critical approach, a reading that focuses on class struggle. This study also uses the resilience theory which, according to Cloete and Mlambo (2014, p. 93), is “a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma.” Drawing on these theories, the paper argues that not all male writers portray women in negative and derogatory terms in their texts as most feminist critics claim. In *A Cowrie of Hope*, the Zambian male writer, Sinyangwe, portrays Nasula, an illiterate and widow who perceives the importance of schooling for her only daughter Sula. To achieve her goal, she stands up to the series of difficulties which at the same time inspire compassion and admiration. Despite the adverse poverty in which she lives, Nasula highly believe that she will fight with the last straw of her blood to send her daughter Sula to senior secondary school, after the latter's successfully passed her grade nine. Finally, the study shows Sinyangwe's commitment to demystify the wrong assumption that women have no voice, and at the same time, to show that woman in general and the traditional woman in particular is the true architect of her own destiny.

Keywords: Zambian Literature, class struggle, resilience, women portrayal, women solidarity, patriarchal oppression

1. INTRODUCTION

African male novelists have long been seen as biased in their portrayal of female characters. Feminist critics argue that male writers have been portraying women in negative and derogatory terms in their texts. For instance, citing Ebele Eko, Amouzou (2006) contains that “male writers invariably cast all women in the strict sexist roles of mothers and wives, submissive to the norms and regulations that restrict them” (2006, p. 97). In the same breath, Ohale (2010) has denounced the patriarchal bent in African literature by male writers, arguing that women have been cast in marginal roles and depicted as mere objects of sexual gratification, procreation and idle gossips. Commenting further on the glaring stereotypical portrayal of women in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Rose Acholonu (2003) states that:

In *Things Fall Apart*, we see Okonkwo playing his role as the traditional head of the family. He is a typical tyrant. He rules and directs his wives in the manner of cattle herdsman. He roars like “the thunder” and administers physical blows to his wives at the slightest provocation. The wives live in awe of him. Achebe, true to tradition and

the precepts of Igbo custom, seems to condone this inhuman treatment of Okonkwo's wives. (2003, p. 39)

And the radical feminist critic Katherine Frank (1987) avers that, male writers often depict female characters as "defined by their relationships to men: someone's daughter or wife or mother, shadowy figures who hover on the fringe of the plot, suckling infants, cooking, plating their hair . . . [they fall] into a specific category of female stereotypes of . . . men appendage, and prostitutes, or courtesans. Sotunsa (2008) corroborates this view when she affirms that: "The pioneer African male writers mirrored patriarchy in their works. The man is often the protagonist and antagonist who dominate other people, while the women are made peripheral and their characters hardly developed" (Cited in Oluwayomi, 2013, p. 371).

But this paper challenges the aforementioned assertions. Indeed, not all African male writers have portrayed women in negative light. As Godwin Uwah (1993) observes, some male writers "have depicted female characters who have eschewed social convention and determinism to redefine or remake themselves within a given situation" (1993, p. 127). Here we are reminded of Ousmane Sembène's *Penda (God's Bits of Wood, 1962)* and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Salimata (The Suns of Independence, 1981)* among others.

Therefore, what I propose to investigate in this article is how the Zambian male writer Binwell Sinyangwe has, like Sembène and Kourouma, rejected the subjugation of the feminine species. As my analysis will reveal, in his oeuvre titled *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000), Sinyangwe has departed from the norm of negative portrayal of women by empowering his female characters. Sinyangwe has empowered a female character and reset her within the society. Through his literary work, the Zambian novelist uses education as a tool to free women. Sinyangwe in my view, went out to recast a new image for Zambian and indeed African women. Mary Kolawole Modupe (1997) highlights this new image given to woman by male writers: "Some men have shown understanding and sincerity in the need to portray female characters as active heroines in making meaningful contributions to their societies" (1997, p.93). Furthermore, my analysis will investigate the portrayal of inner resilience with which Sinyangwe's female character, Nasula, is equipped. Through this inner resilience, his character embodies democratic values and becomes role model and symbol of hope, not only for the empowerment of women but also for their total liberation from all negative perceptions and oppressions.

2. SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* is set in two geographical areas: Mbala and Lusaka. The novel tells the story of a young widowed village woman called Nasula, who is desperate to search for money for her daughter's secondary schooling. But Nasula is unable to pay for her daughter Sula's education due to economic hardships that hit the Zambian society in the "nineties". Her inability to support her child's education seems to extinguish her hope of sending her daughter Sula to grade ten, after the latter's successfully passing of grade nine. However, a childhood friend, Nalukwi advises Nasula to take her last and only bag of beans to Lusaka – the capital city – for sell, where the much sought-after Mbala beans sell lucratively. Nasula takes off for Lusaka, but in the city, she finds herself exposed to new, and predatory

dangers: the theft of her beans – on which her hopes depend and which she eventually retrieves after overcoming a series of tribulations. This text was selected because it is captivating, while the writer strives hard to portray women in numerous forms, about their character, thought and their idiosyncrasies.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper has feminism as its main theoretical base but reference would be made to Marxism because of the latter's stance against all forms of domination. This is because feminist ideology which preoccupies itself with the liberation of women from masculine domination, shares certain commons traits with Marxism because of the premium it places on plus value and alienation. Other theoretical approaches which my study is anchored on include patriarchy and the resilience theory.

Scholars and critics have defined feminism in different ways, both as an ideology and a movement. As an ideology, it indicates “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men” (Hornby, 2010, p. 545). Similarly, Odonkor and Bampoh-Addo (2014) contend that “feminist ideology preoccupies itself with the liberation of womenfolk from the yoke of masculine domination” (2014, p.123). For Hooks (2000), cited in Koussouhon et al. (2015), “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sex exploitation, and oppression” (2015, p. 315). Drawing on this, sherry Ruth (1988, cited in Olufemi, 2015, p. 22) defines feminist movement as “a movement concerned with political, social and economic equalities of the sex.” In essence, feminism is about making positive change in the society through the betterment of women. It is obvious in the foregoing that the utmost aim of feminism is to stand up against male-dominance and power as well as free the womenfolk from all forms of societal ills buttressed by patriarchy.

Deeply entrenched in the concept of feminism is the notion of patriarchy. Feminist scholars define patriarchy as a social or ideological construct that consider men as superior to women. According to Oluwayomi (2013), patriarchy is “a form of sociological stratification that exalts the male gender over the female [one]” (2013, p. 370). Simply put, it is an appropriation of social power by men to the exclusion of women and the inferiorization of women by men as a way of justifying the subordination of women in society (Cited in Koussouhon et al. 2015, p. 315). Commenting on the meaning of patriarchy and its effects on women, Mutunda (2015) observes:

Patriarchy is a gender system in which men dominate women. The ascribed superior status of men is encouraged and sustained by social institutions that are considered unquestionable and natural. In addition, this system of social stratification based on sex provides men with power and material advantages while depriving women of both those benefits. (2015, p. 52)

Similarly, Hooks (1994) views patriarchy as “the institutionalized structure of male dominance [that] encourages males [. . .] to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression and coercion towards others [particularly] women” (1994, p. 148). By the same token, Adrienne Rich (1986) defines patriarchy as “the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law,

language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine which part women shall or shall not play" (1986, p. 59). Patriarchy, therefore, is about the arrangement of life in the eyes of the dominant group, i.e. men. This particular culture privileges the exercise of men's power over women.

I would wish, at this juncture, to quickly distinguish between Western feminism and African view of feminism. Western feminists refuse to be mothers because in their view, motherhood, the bearing and raising of children, is a hindrance to the fulfilment of feminists' aspirations. Western feminists call for women's voices to be heard by revolting against what they term 'false cultural notions about gender', which they consider as seeking to make women inferior to men. For instance, in her oeuvre *The Second sex* (1949), de Beauvoir calls on women to break patriarchal construct of women by men by fighting to be 'significant' in society. For Millet (1970), women must revolt against the power centre of culture which is male dominated by breaking down existing structures that tend to see women as passive, meek and weak. In short, Western feminism then is combative, revolt oriented and hence calls for a destruction of the status quo.

African feminism differs greatly from Western radical feminism in that, its primary goal is to serve as voice for the voiceless in a culture where the woman is seen as the insignificant human being. African feminism gets to the bottom of African gender relations and the problems of African women - illuminating their causes and consequences - and criticises them. Citing Filomina Chioma Steady, Mekgwe (2008, p. 16) argued that African feminism emphasizes autonomy and co-operation, nature over culture, the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship. Indeed, African feminism emphasizes cooperation with men, the affirmation of motherhood and the family; above all, it concerns to criticize patriarchy manifestation in society.

Unlike Western feminism, African feminism is accommodating although some African female writers are radical and at times militant in their approach. Chukwuma (1994) argues that,

African feminism should be understood in the context of the family, where family transcends the nuclear family of husband, wife and biological children. The extended family is the main support base where a woman can always find acceptance and acclaim should her marriage fail. The centrality of the family informs the accommodationist stance of African feminism. Men have a place in it, so do the children. (1994, p. 109).

African feminism is not antagonistic to men but challenges them to be aware of aspects of women's subjugation and encourage them to fight such vices. Citing Oyewumi (2005), Atanga (2008) opines that:

African feminism does not focus only on juxtaposing male dominance with female subjugation or on fighting battles with men, nor on fertility rates and poverty, but is also about challenging the status quo, describing the ways in which contemporary 'patriarchies' in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realizing their potential beyond their traditional roles as hard-working income-generating wives and mothers. (2008, p. 308)

In addition, just like other feminisms, African feminism is not forgoing all the things that other feminists struggle for – respect, dignity, equality, lives free from violence and the threat of violence. Davies and Graves (1986) summed up African feminism as a political philosophy that:

Recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but challenges them to be aware of certain aspects of women's subjugation, which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples. It recognizes that certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others. It acknowledges its affinities with international feminism, but delineates a specific African feminism with certain specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African societies. It examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women [while] reject[ing] those, which work to their detriment, and those not simply import Western women's agenda. Thus, it respects African women's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons [...] it respects African women's self-reliance and the penchant to cooperative work and social organization. It understands the interconnectedness of race, class, and sex oppression. (1986, pp. 8-11)

In the above definition, Davies and Graves highlight the compounding effects of colonisation and women's struggles in Africa. They also acknowledge interaction with Western feminism while simultaneously showcasing African feminism uniqueness. Davies and Graves further show that African feminism is not just about women's issues, but about intersecting social, cultural, political and economic societal issues that lead to men's dominance and women's subjugation. I can therefore argue that African feminism adopts a complementary approach, which is indeed an African-centred perspective that is intellectually conducive to an African problem. Evidently, it is an Afrocentric solution.

Marxism on the other hand is seen as both a political movement and an ideology grounded on the social dynamics of struggle for power, equality and justice and struggle against domination for social reconstruction and development. This is why Eagleton (1996) describes Marxism as the "scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them (Quoted in Odonkor & Bampoh-Addo, 2014, p. 123). What that means is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggle of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression.

In the light of the above, it is fair to say that Marxism shares a lot in common with feminism because both seek the overthrow of dictatorship and the emancipation of the oppressed or the marginalized. These deprived groups must take their destiny into their own hands and reclaim their rightful place in society.

Another important theoretical term used in this paper is resilience. The most common definition of resilience is: positive adaptation despite adversity (Luthar, 2006). In their study on trauma and resilience in Zimbabwean fiction, Cloete and Mlambo (2014) explain that resilience is as a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite

experiences of significant adversity or trauma (2014, p. 93). For Mlambo (2011), resilience is the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life, so as to survive and move beyond survival (Mlambo, 2011). The emphasis is on fortitude, how to survive in the midst of adversity and the subjectivity that emanates in a people so as to surmount adversity and meet the challenges in all their enormity and excesses. Resilience, therefore, emphasises the strengths that the people have rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit (Mlambo, 2014, p.39).

4. DISCUSSION

Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* opens with the heroine Nasula who is worried about the money required for her daughter Sula's schooling. A daughter she refers to as "A Cowrie of Hope" because she believes that when she is educated she will save the two of them from their poverty – has just passed to Grade ten at St. Theresa Boarding Secondary School in Kasama, away from home. But Nasula has no one to lean on for help. She is poor, orphan, illiterate and widow, and the responsibility of educating her only daughter and child Sula has landed squarely on her. As revealed in the narrative:

Nasula was poverty [. . .] Suffering was her life. She wore it like her own skin. [. . .] Nasula had no means and no dependable support. She was the gods' plant growing on poor soils without tendrils. Both her parents had died not long after she had come of age and had left her with nothing but herself. Her late husband had left her with some money and goods, but her in-laws had swooped everything out of her possession and left her to languish with nothing in her hands, alone with her only daughter and child. She had lived like that to this day, poor, parentless, widowed and without relative to talk to and to whom she could run. (4-5)

From the above hyperbolic description of Nasula's social condition, I can say that the protagonist comes from what Karl Max termed "lumpenproletariat" rag poverty, which means that she belongs to the very bottom of the class hierarchy (Cited in Aguessy, 2014).

But for Nasula, inaction is not an option. Despite being orphan, widow, poor, and illiterate; she is determined to fight for formal education for her unique daughter Sula. She believes that education offers independence and freedom. As the omniscient narrator explains, although Nasula had never stepped into a classroom, "she understood the importance of education and wanted her daughter to go far with schooling. She understood the unfairness of life of a woman and craved for emancipation, freedom, independence in the life of her daughter" (5). In addition, "what she had seen and heard and gone through along their pathways, awakened her to the indignities and injustices of a woman who could only put her life in the hands of a man, and to the possibilities of a good education giving a woman independence and freedom" (5-6). In fact, every child has the right to education. As stated in the United Nations' declarations of children's rights:

The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He / she shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities,

his individual judgement and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

(<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humaneights/resources/child.asp>)

This part of the United Nations' declaration of children's rights to education clearly sets for the necessity and importance of education for children as members of the society. In Sinyangwe's novel, Nasula, though illiterate, believes and understands, in the same perspective the necessity and importance of formal education for her daughter Sula. She knows that the education of her daughter must help change her living conditions. Therefore, her attendance of some educated women's meeting sheds light on her vision on education:

The faces and voices of those young women of good education and good jobs in offices who came to Kalingalinga shanty compound, where she lived with Winelo, to talk to the women of the compound about the freedom of the woman. What they said about the importance of knowing how to read and write and having a good education, what they said about the rights of a woman, and the need for a woman to stand on her own. (8)

From the excerpted passage above, it is clearly stated that education offers better life, improved health care, skilled workforce, better employment opportunities, high salaries, and greater opportunities for the future.

As mentioned earlier, Nasula's parents died at her earlier age. Subsequently, an acquaintance in the village hurriedly married Nasula off to Winelo Chiswebe. It is clear that, though not directly mentioned in the text, this whirlwind marriage to Winelo was arranged, Nasula was not consulted to hear her views. Undoubtedly, as Mutunda (2015) rightly points out, this patriarchal practice of arranged marriage reinforces male supremacy while depriving the woman of the power to choose and to control her body.

Shortly thereafter, Winelo took Nasula to the city, where she never knew will be the beginning of her problems, for a series of misfortunes will dog her every step. From the outset, the marriage of to Winelo and Nasula is marred with insults, physical, psychological and emotional abuses. Due to the patriarchal powers society has granted on men, Winelo treats Nasula like a non-human, a doll without thoughts and feelings. Nasula is expected to remain mute when she is unfairly treated by her husband, so as to show submissiveness and respect. In one instance, when Nasula tries to complain about Winelo's outing behaviour, he responds violently, telling her that he is the sole provider and head of the household, and that she is a poor woman who should just keep quiet:

Woman, don't I keep you [like a pet], or maybe it's you who keeps me? Is it not me who buys the food in this house? Is it not me [the head and boss of this house?] . . . A woman will never appreciate a thing. Look, Nasula, why don't you just pack [and] go back to the village if you are tired of being in a marriage with me? I can bring in someone else this very moment. [Don't you know that "Women are like a duiker's droppings" (meaning that because women are as plentiful as a duiker's dung, a misbehaving wife can be replaced] (6-7). *The additional comments are mine.*

From the above quotation, it can be said that, Winelo assumes that a woman cannot do, think or say anything important, and that man's power, bestowed by patriarchy and expressed in his role as head of the family, has to be used to keep the woman in check because otherwise she

will abuse her freedom. Consequently, he expects his wife to be submissive and remain silent whenever he talks to her. After all, he sees himself as the supreme head of the household, and if his wife fails to comply, she must pay for her insubordination.

Surprisingly, the enlightened Nasula could not let Winelo muzzle her, neither trample on her human right. Thus, she tells him: “Father of Sula, let me go where you found me. You [brought] me here to insult me for what you give me and do for me? [...] I am poor and a woman, but you do not stop being a human being when you are poor or a woman” (7). Here, Nasula appears to be asserting her own individuality and personal worth. She is able to see her value as human being, much to Winelo’s surprise.

Meanwhile, Nasula’s husband Winelo Chiswebe continued with his clandestine night activities until, one night, he was shot to death by the police during a robbery in which he acted as a gang lead. Though Winelo has been killed by policemen, his relatives accused Nasula of killing him, simply because she had no parents or relatives of her own to stand for her. The allegation against her is expressed as follows: “How they turned against her. Blame her for the death of the husband. People of the world, how could anyone blame her for the death of a man who had been shot by policemen while he was stealing?” (8). In substance, the preceding quotation addresses the vulnerability of the status of a woman within the society structured by male chauvinism. This unquestionable social injustice causes enumerable pains and sufferings to women.

Not satisfied with accusing Nasula of having murdered her husband, the Chiswebe’s family wanted Nasula to remarry the womanizer Isaki Chiswebe, the younger brother of the deceased Winelo: “After the burial, the news was broken to her that Isaki Chiswebe would be taking over as her husband” (8). Clearly, there is a paradox here in that a woman who was, a while ago, accused of having murdered her husband is the one Isaki Chiswebe would like to remarry. What could be the reason?

It should be mentioned that, in African cultures, particularly among some Zambian ethnic groupings, widow inheritance or levirate is a fairly common practice. Under this practice, when a man dies his wife will be inherited by his brother whether the latter is married or not. The widow then becomes the legal wife of the man inheriting her. She can raise children through the new husband. All the children the widow already had also become the bonafide property of the heir or successor. The brother who inherits the wife and children of his deceased relative performs all the duties of a husband and father. I should add that, widow practice is legitimized through some religious beliefs that the spirit of the late husband would only rest peacefully, if the surviving spouse remarry within the deceased family, otherwise it would constantly cause disaster to the uncooperative spouse.

The custom of widow inheritance was once regarded as effective method of providing for widows in the traditional society. In the past, the widows and their children increased the labour pool of the successor and he was responsible for their maintenance. However, these arrangements have become unattractive and burdensome, and most people are no longer interested in widow inheritance or levirate marriage in which a widow is remarried to her deceased husband’s brother or other male relative (Korieh, 1996). In addition, as Sossou (2002) observes, the custom of widow inheritance breaches the 1979 UN Women’s Convention on the

Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Social, Political and Economic Charters and the 1993 International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (2002: 201). Furthermore, due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, very few people contemplate widow inheritance. This is evidenced in Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*.

Indeed, after the news was broken to her that, as required by custom, Isaki Chiswebe had to take over as her husband, the protagonist Nasula happily opposed to her in-laws' decision of remarrying Isaki Chiswebe and was ready to bear the consequences caused by her refusal: "She knew Isaki Chiswebe and his ways in things of the flesh very well. She also knew the Chiswebe family too well to remain married to one of its members. She refused to be married to Isaki" (8). Knowing too well that Isaki Chiswebe was a polygamist and womanizer, Nasula rejected being the one to complete Isaki's collection of women; she also didn't want to eventually die of HIV/AIDS like Chiswebe and his three wives later did.

By challenging Isaki Chiswebe's misguided performance of masculinity that seeks to objectify a woman, Nasula asserts her own individuality and personal worth. She also wants to remind Isaki Chiswebe that marriage means an act of faith and love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen. In this regards, it can be said that Nasula is portrayed as strong and dignified woman who knows what is best for her. The protagonist takes an African feminist approach that, according to Gatwiri and McLaren (2016), "attempts to educate, empower and elevate women to a position where they can own their power, not against men but alongside them" (2016, p. 267). She challenges patriarchy without emasculating the Chiswebe or rather the masculine world.

In effect, her determination to stand ground to the patriarchal and dehumanizing practice of levirate confers on her the characteristics of a strong and revolutionary woman, more like Penda, the female protagonist in Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*. Many female critics hail such actions of bravery. For instance, Julie Agbasiere (1999) views such a woman as "a woman of action who is ruled by her head, who knows what she wants and goes for it" (1999, p. 75). In Chukwuma's view (1991), Nasula has the courage to "burst the fence of subjugation and nihilism and turn her back to its oppression" (1991, p. 32). Nasula has broken the bondage to tradition and opens to emancipation though such a behaviour has a price to pay for.

At this juncture, I wouldn't be wrong to argue that the writer portrays Nasula as bold enough to fight the patriarchal oppressive structure that grant men more power to dominate women. Her reaction to the levirate system reveals how a woman is capable of using her inner masculine traits to fight the oppressive structure head on, thus taking her destiny into her own hands and restoring her true sense of self and dignity.

As a result of her refusal to adhere to custom, Nasula was dispossessed of all the properties the late Winelo Chiswebe left her and her daughter by her in-laws. She and Sula were thereafter chased from the home like – in the words of Aguessy (2014) – "a fish failing on the sand beach" (2014, p. 76), much to Nasula's surprise and dismay. The narrator evokes the circumstances of the expropriation as follows:

Was the man who was given to read the words the deceased had written even allowed to finish reading? How they frowned upon everything and tore the paper on which the words were written to pieces. How they took away everything from her except what

was on her body. How they threw her out of the house and sold it, leaving her to spend nights at the bus station with the child before she found money for her travel and returned to the village. (9-10)

The above quotation reminds the reader of what most African women endure after the demise of the husband. For Nasula, no sooner does the husband dies than her husband's relations take everything away from her upon her refusal to marry Isaki the husband's brother. One may wonder why is it that Nasula had to undergo such psychological torture and yet she was just exercising her right to choose what she wants. If there is any verdict to give, I can say that it is acquisitiveness by the Chiswebes which basically controls the treatment of a widow like Nasula, they want to rip where they never sowed, and that is Winelo's properties including his wife.

Furthermore, Nasula's intuitive refusal to take her late husband brother Isaki Chiswebe as husband, has rightly saved her from a fatal destiny. For, Isaki Chiswebe suffered from HIV and died from AIDS, including his three wives. As Aguessy rightly (2014) points out, "By preserving her dignity, Nasula avoids death" (2014, p. 77). The omniscient narrator explains how Nasula witnessed the disastrous existence and demise of Isaki and his three wives as follows:

She could only watched the sick man and reeled with horror at the thought of what would have been had she agreed to marry Isaki after the death of Winelo. Nobody had told her, but she knew. She could tell what it was, the disease that had afflicted Isaki and his three wives. It was the new, unmentionable disease of the world that came of the taste of flesh, the one that made you thin before taking you, the disease of today. (27)

Back in the village after the demise of Winelo, Nasula has to raise her daughter alone. She has the will to send her daughter Sula to school for she understands the importance of education for she believes that education will bring salvation to her daughter and herself. I have already pointed out that Nasula's dream to send Sula to secondary school required one hundred thousand *Kwacha*, but the family's financial precariousness does not allow her to send her daughter Sula to school. Though she cannot afford the required money, she did not cross her arms and watch helplessly, as the narrator recounts:

Her name, Nasula, means mother of Sula and the meaning of Sula, her daughter's name, was 'let things be'. But Nasula, she who was supposed to be the mother of letting things be, would not let things be over her daughter's schooling. She insisted that her daughter must continue with her schooling and so she told her only daughter and the people she spoke to in search of help with her problem. (4)

In the aforementioned excerpt, Sinyangwe has portrayed a woman fighting for the transformation of her destiny and that of her daughter. As shown in the novel, Nasula has worked for others, expecting to gather her daughter's school fees, unfortunately the only payment she receive was in kind and not in cash. Equally, Nasula has farmed for the same reason, but all odds appear against her, the output has not met her expectations for the harvest was bad that year. The narrator expresses the austerity of the year as follows: "The rains were bad and so the crops and the harvest were bad too. Without what to sell from the field people

had no money" (53). Couple with the scarcity of rains, money was equally hard to be come by due to the prevailing austerities, which makes Nasula to lament: "These were the nineties. The late nineties. They were lean years. They were the years of each person for himself and hope only under the shadow of the gods" (14). However, Nasula has to survive with her only daughter, and sees that education is the key to success if her daughter is not to toe her own line of suffering.

She was almost in deadlock when providentially her childhood friend Nalukwi suggested her to bring her to Kamwala market in Lusaka to sell the rest of her beans, because the quality of beans that Nasula had (Mbala beans) is runs after at Kamwala. Once more, Nasula is given a new hope. According to her friend, the sale of the bag of beans will help her pay Sula's enrolment and school fees. So, the information resuscitates Nasula:

Beans are very expensive in Lusaka at this time of the year, there are very few kinds available, especially the type that you grow here in Mbala, the yellow and white bean. Even if you have just one bag, it will give you the one hundred thousand *Kwacha* that you need to send the child to school. Are you talking Nalukwi? Nasula's eyes and mouth were suddenly wide with curiosity. (53)

The above quote succinctly illustrates that women have to join hands together in order to change their living conditions. By doing so, they will free themselves from patriarchy. Irène D'Almeida (1986) shares this view when she states that: "a greater solidarity among women is needed to alleviate the agony women go through in [marital and social] situation" (1986, p. 164). In the same breath, Cooper (2010) asserts that "women are the primary catalysts for reform" (2010, p. 53). Indeed, Nasula and Nalukwi acts as catalysts for change in their relentlessly struggle to lift themselves from their subordinate state and carve out new roles and identities for themselves by trying to empower a daughter Sula through education.

With her friend encouragement, Nasula resolves to take the only bag of beans in her possession to Lusaka in order to send her daughter to school. The motivation, zeal and the perseverance to train her daughter come from her observing other women who are educated and whom she has seen how they have succeeded in life and now stand on their own. After their arrival at Kamwala market in Lusaka, everything presaged that Nasula would have a good harvest and return home soon, for the quality of her beans is run after by potential buyers. However, a catalyst situation intervenes and changes the normal course of events. A wrong, crook and thief customer comes her way and smartly goes away with Nasula's bag of beans without paying her the agreed price. Once more, Nasula's dream of sending her daughter to St. Theresa Girls Secondary School in Kasama becomes a mere illusion. She has to say this after Gode Silavwe dupes her bag of beans which is the only last hope for her to educate her daughter: "We are too lowly to know people like that or what families they come from, [...] We are the doormat of the world. We can be stepped on without knowing who is doing the stepping" (92). At this moment, Nasula remembers what Nalukwi told her, while they were in Swelini, about men of the city who pretend to be what they are not just because they want to survive. Some who look like ministers or even the president himself turn into cheats and thieves. Gode's case can be linked to similar instances in African society where politicians in the form of presidents, ministers and governors present themselves as 'Messiahs', only to end up pulling the fast one on the masses and getting away with their loots.

At this juncture, one may be tempted to say that Nasula has been a victim of her own naivety and excess of joy. Indeed, profiting from her inexperience and ignorance of the realities of the city, Gode Silavwe offered her a golden price which Nasula believed will transform her destiny. But Nasula's Zeal, joy and exhilaration will be short-lived. Her existence only echoes darkness. From this catalyst situation, Sinyangwe points out that in a patriarchal society, man will never help a woman grow and thereby constitutes a hindrance to her development. This is evidenced by the attitude of domination of the male vendor at Kamwala market, who has helped Nasula with money just enough for her to travel back home: "I asked some people how much is needed to travel to Mbala. They told me it is anything from fifteen to somewhere nearing twenty thousand *Kwacha*. So, I decided to give you this, mother of our children" (94). Though he has the possibility – after hearing Nasula's plight and witnessing her misfortune – of giving her more money to solve her problems, he prefers to offer her just the chance to go back home. This confirms what Mutunda (2007) says in one of his works that, in a patriarchal society all women are second class citizen and that only themselves can change their own destiny.

On her way back home, Nasula keeps thinking and interrogating herself how she is going to send her daughter to school, considering that her bag of beans which is the last hope she had has been stolen by Gode Silavwe. The omniscient narrator makes an account of Nasula's state of being through some interrogations: "Suffering woman, what is it that you have done to deserve this misfortune? What trouble have you caused against the gods? What have you spat on the shrine of your ancestors?" (85). But Nasula has not lost hope. On the verge of despair, she gathers all her strength and flashes again her target and decides half way to return to Lusaka by begging the bus conductor to reimburse her the money of the rest of the trip:

Conductor I beg you, give me back the money. I want to remain here [so that I can get back to Lusaka.] Here is the ticket. Take out your share of the money and give me the rest. [...] It is not my wish to trouble you or want you to waist a seat. If I had a way I would forget about the money, but I am a woman of no means and a big problem has afflicted me. I have no other money to use apart from what I paid for your bus ticket. (109)

But her plea falls on death ear, the uncompromising young conductor could not help Nasula. However, with the driver's intervention, Nasula is given back the money she requested. Then she comes back Kamwala market in search of the thief who stole her 'cowrie of hope'. She has been very resilient and determined to find Gode Silavwe, the thief of the hope to attain her ambition. Nasula has nothing to lose if not her own life and she is ready to sacrifice it for the sake of her daughter. So, like a madwoman, she has wondered in Lusaka for days and nights in vain. She has slept in the open air barely eating and without washing herself because of male wickedness. Luckily enough, as she is wondering, Nasula finds Gode Silavwe's yellow car and posted herself against the vehicle. Seeing Gode comes towards the car, Nasula gathers all her energy braving the dangerousness and the violence of the hooligan. Like a hungry tiger, she openly attacks the crook and asks for payment or return her bag of beans:

'Have I not found you? You thought I would not find you, but I have found you. You will not go anywhere until you give me my bag of beans or the money for it,' she cried out. Then gripped by a sudden fit of madness, she stepped forward and threw herself at

the man, grabbing both lapels of his jacket in her hands and burying her head in his belly and perfume. ‘Give me my bag of beans or the money for it! Or you will have to kill me here and now!’ (126)

Gode Silavwe’s reaction was so violent that Aguessy (2014, p. 81) rightly terms it “an epic fight between David and Goliath in the Holy Bible.” The narrator conjures up that epic fight in the following excerpt:

Gode Silavwe engaged the engine. The car jerked into motion. Nasula seized hold of the handle of the rear door and pulled at it. It opened. By chance Gode had not locked it. Now the vehicle was gathering momentum. The door slipped out of her hand and banged itself closed again as she fell slightly behind. But as she opened the door, the seat-belt on that side of the car had fallen out. Now she saw the wide black belt hanging from under the bottom edge of the rear door with the metallic hook at its end on the ground and shining brightly in the sun. She lunged forward and grabbed the belt with her left hand, letting her bag of sackcloth drop from her right shoulder. The car pulled at her with a sudden and violent force. She fell down with equal suddenness and violence, her *citenge* (wrapper) and tropical sandals dropping off her like beans from a dry pod that had split open after being struck against a hard stick. There was, suddenly, a deafening noise of whistling and yelling from terrified crowd warning the driver of the fleeing car that he was going to kill a person. One instant more, and the car would have started pulling her along. But, in the nick of time, Gode stopped the car and switched off the engine. Nasula clung to the seat-belt more firmly, now with both hands, in a sad coil, seething and trembling, her eyes tightly closed in prayer. ‘Get up,’ someone standing nearby said to her after a while. ‘It is over and all right, madam, you can now get up.’ She looked up and saw it was a policeman in a familiar khaki uniform, holding a gun. (127-128)

From the excerpted passage above, it is clear that the story reaches the climax when Gode attempts to crush the poor Nasula for fighting for what rightly belongs to her. But the latter stands ground and grabs one of the car doors and later, the salutary seat-belt risking her life like the actors attracting public attention to the scene. Fortunately, she is saved at the very last moment by a professional policeman on duty. Once at the police station, the young policeman brings the case to his superiors where Nasula witnesses a scene of corruption between Gode and the careless, unprofessional and greedy inspector. This particular policeman feels there is nothing a poor widow like Nasula can offer him and that the best is to accept the bribe from Gode and stop pretending to be good. It is regrettable that, the police, whose obligation is to protect the lives and properties of citizens are the ones who make sure that people’s lives, properties, and rights are taken away from them. The police, the first point of contact for a victim reporting abuse, are here perceived as belonging to an institution that victimises women. According to Human Rights Watch – South Africa – (1995) “police culture works against women [...] the attitudes and assumptions that the police have about women undermine the proper functioning of the law” (quoted in Green, 1999, p. 115). Thus, Nasula’s hope vanishes and she is once again plunged into a new deadlock.

However, as usual, Nasula has not been discouraged; she becomes more possessed with determination to report the case to a more senior police officer. After reflection, she brings

desperately the case to the highest boss of this police station. As there still is the providence for the poor, the topmost boss of the police station – Samson Luhila – said the law and justice was rendered to Nasula. As a result, Gode has been wanted and brought back to the station and he paid more money to her than he is normally supposed to: “One hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* instead of one hundred and twenty thousand?” (142). Finally, Gode was put in jail and his accomplice Inspector was suspended:

Take this man to the Criminal Investigation Department. Leave him there for the constable who arrested him to come and handle the paperwork. Tell whoever is there that my instructions are that after this has been done and the docket opened, he must be locked up. [As for you Inspector,] I have suspended you, while the charges against you are investigated, and you are on suspension starting from now. (142-143)

Nasula’s resilience, determination and courage have paid off. If one can characterize Nasula’s achievement as a victory, then it is a well-deserved victory. The best lesson one can draw from this apotheosis is that whatever the situation, a woman needs the collaboration of a man of good moral and will in her fight for liberation from male chauvinism.

What is striking and draws reader’s attention is that Sinyangwe depicts in his novel a lone woman in fight against the whole social patriarchal superstructure. Furthermore, Sinyangwe portrays a strong, resilient and dignified woman who knows what she wants and goes after that. Nasula knows that her whole life is a mess right from the time her parents die leaving her with nothing till the stealing of her bag of beans. She is never discouraged, she continues struggling, hoping she will be successful someday. Her past life and experience never discourage her. Nasula knows what she wants, which is her daughter’s future education and she goes after that, herself not opportunized to go to school. She does not mind what people think and say to discourage her because she knows what she wants. Thus, Binwell Sinyangwe is calling up women to stand up and unite in order to overcome patriarchy and reclaim their rights from men.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude this analysis, I would say that contrary to female critics’ claim, Sinyangwe projects female characters in his fiction to show that women’s voice should not be muffled voices of a group of subaltern, but ideological voices. In Sinyangwe’s novel, Nasula is a very remarkable woman, strong, competent, ambitious, resilient and courageous, who despite setbacks, rejects all subjugation and male oppression, and protests against the second position of their gender. The writer uses this strategy in his fiction to show the importance of collaboration and complementarity among the sexes and to prove thus a womanist point. Furthermore, Sinyangwe moves towards the creation neither of man’s world nor a woman’s, but human world, in his fiction one can see a “new” woman. Through the female protagonist Nasula, the writer wishes to show that woman in general and the traditional woman in particular is the true architect of her own destiny. Nasula is bold enough to fight the patriarchal oppressive structure that grants men more power to dominate women. Her reaction to the levirate practice and her determination to retrieve the stolen bag of beans – the only hope to send her daughter to school – reveal how a woman is capable of using her inner masculine traits to fight oppressive structure head on. Thus taking her destiny into her own hands. I should however

mention that, in spite of the acclaim won by African men authors for presenting a more balanced portrait of the female character, so much still remains to be done by way of creating awareness and continuing to work toward the empowerment all women.

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