

Renegotiating the Terms of African Womanism: Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* and Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

Faith Ben-Daniels

University of Education, Winneba, College of Technology Education, Faculty of Education and Communication Sciences, Department of Languages Education, P. O. Box 1277, Kumasi, Ghana

Abstract

Over the years African women have struggled for space and recognition in all spheres of human life. Writers from Efuwa Theodora Sutherland, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo down to Chimamanda N. Adichie, Lola Shoneyin and Ayobami Adebayo have expressed African women's struggles from divergent viewpoints. As such, this paper returns to the concept of African womanism as created by Clenora Hudson-Weems and endeavours to dissect how Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* and Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* engages this concept in order to create awareness of the African woman's disposition. Subsequently, this paper focuses on the new approaches to the discussion of the African woman's liberation. It takes a look at the face of African womanism as a movement that advocates the liberation of the African woman within her cultural niche. It also discusses how Sinyangwe and Andreas address the negative factors oppressing the African woman and also suggest ways of liberation by renegotiation.

Keywords: African womanism, womanist, African women, blackness, feminism, ways of liberation

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Introduction

Binwell Sinyangwe, in his novel, *A Cowrie of Hope*, tells the compelling story of a widow, Nasula, (who is herself an orphan), and a single parent, to her daughter, Sula, who she believes must go to school in order to become liberated and self-sufficient later on in life. Neshani Andreas in her novel, *the Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, tells the story of Mee Kauna who suffers physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband. Mee Kauna is finally liberated when her husband dies. However, she must face the traditional consequences of being branded a widow, a witch and a murderer.

According to Reed (2001), Clenora Hudson-Weems coined the term, Africana womanism in the late 1980s. The purpose of creating this term was to build and sustain an ideology for all women of African descent. The ideological goal was to promote African culture and Afrocentrism among African women in the diaspora. The focus was on the needs, struggles and experiences of African women of the diaspora. Reed also explains that Clenora Hudson-Weems designed eighteen ways in which the "Africana woman" could be identified. Reed lists these eighteen descriptions that Clenora Hudson-Weems designed as follows: "1) a self-namer; 2) a self-definer; 3) family-centered; 4) genuine in sisterhood; 5) strong; 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle; 7) whole; 8) authentic; 9) a flexible role player; 10) respected; 11) recognized; 12) spiritual; 13) male compatible; 14) respectful of elders; 15) adaptable; 16) ambitious; 17) mothering; and 18) nurturing." (Reed, 2001) According to Reed (2001) Clenora Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism theory was focused on representing all black women either in America, the diaspora or on the African continent.

However, over the years, the concept of feminism seems to take the larger space of dialectic engagement. Perhaps this is as a result of the fact that African women are busy finding their space in contemporary socio-economic and political dispensations. As such, writers like Buchi Emecheta have questioned the institution of motherhood and its essence in the novel, *Joys of Motherhood*. And writers like Amma Darko in the novel, *Faceless*, display the dichotomy of African women trying to juggle motherhood, wives and careers while writers like Ama Ataa Aidoo in the novel, *Changes*, confront the elephant in the female closet—can the African woman really have it all—a growing career, a loving and happy marriage, children? Notwithstanding the varied discussions and approaches by African women writers on the subject of feminism in Africa, there is also the presence of other African writers whose writing represent the needs, struggles, hopes and aspirations of African women on the continent from an African womanist point of view. As such, these writers present African women negotiating for space and acceptance within their varied cultures while also rediscovering their femininity and 'blackness.' The representation of these African women characters on the continent by African writers branches away from the European ideology of feminism but has a lot in common with Clenora Hudson-Weem's Africana womanism. They share in common the consciousness of the fact that the African woman or black woman's cultural beliefs and ideologies must re-evolve itself at an equal pace with evolving modernist ideologies.

As a result, these writers through their works have consciously and unconsciously created the 'African face'

of Africana womanism; which for the benefit of this discussion would be described as African womanism, hence. This 'African face' of African womanism is not looking at grasping modernism in totality, but finding a balance between modernist ideologies that individual African women agree with and are comfortable with; and their individual cultural beliefs and practises that they are keen on holding on to.

In addition, African womanism is not only focused on pointing out cultural male privileges as one major factor that suppresses the African woman; but it also focuses on possible ways in which the African male who is considered as part of the problem of female oppression within the African society can become part of the liberation process by renegotiating the dynamics of the existing cultural beliefs and practises.

African Womanism As Engaged By Binwell Sinyangwe and Neshani Andreas

Binwell Sinyangwe in his novel, *A Cowrie of Hope*, presents to us the situation of the uneducated African woman in Sub-Saharan Africa. Per culture, this woman, Nasula; who happens to be his main character, must marry her late husband's brother, Isaki Chiswebe. It is the only way by which the family of her late husband would continue to be responsible for her upkeep and that of her daughter's. It is also the only way by which she would be given the inheritance left for her and her daughter by her late husband. However, Nasula refuses this marriage, and as such, loses everything to her in-laws.

Sinyangwe also begins to assert his purpose for his character, Nasula, when in her musings on her way to Mangano village to beg for the money to send her daughter, Sula, to school, she explains why she refused to marry her brother-in-law, Isaki, after the death of her husband. In fact she was determined to:

Perish with her poverty rather than accept a forced marriage and the wealth her dead husband had left her. She would not marry a man as lecherous as Isaki Chiswebe who already had three wives and had divorced the gods knew how many times before. Sinyangwe (2000, p.16)

The above reasons show the danger of the situation Nasula is saving herself from by not marrying her late husband's brother. Her refusal is a revolt to a cultural practise that is not necessarily bad (depending on the parties involved in its practise and how they perceive it) but then is a tool that can be unscrupulously manipulated to oppress and subjugate women. Nasula's refusal in marrying her late husband's brother leads to her and her daughter being ostracised from her home and supposed family. Nasula in her recollection of the situation explains that:

What was the use? Was the man who was given to read the words the deceased had written even allowed to finish reading? ... 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. Sinyangwe (2000, p.9-10)

Nasula's recollection above is a reflection of the face of African womanism which seeks to look at the plight of the African woman who is widowed. For instance, it is common in certain parts of Ghana for the widow to be accused of being the witch who has killed her husband and in some other parts the widow is not only accused of being the murderer of her husband, but she and her children are disinherited by her in-laws. Likewise, Nasula is accused of being the cause of her husband's death. In her musings she informs her readers that her husband's family accused her of being:

Demanding, she had caused her husband to go and steal. So they said. God's people, which day? Nasula, the poorest woman under the sun, she who was grateful even for a cup of water so dirty as to be mud, of all things, to haunt a man into stealing such big things as Winelo had met his death stealing? What falsehood! ... Were the lies not an excuse for hidden intentions? Sinyangwe (2000, p.9)

And indeed, they had hidden intentions. Before Winelo dies he writes a letter in which he leaves everything—the house and an amount of 750000 kwacha to Nasula and his daughter but, as earlier explained by Nasula, she and her daughter are not only denied the monetary inheritance, they are also thrown out of their home. The situation of losing her monetary inheritance and her home forces her to return to her village and a life of poverty. In fact, Sinyangwe paints a vivid picture of Nasula's poverty:

The hut sat askew, helpless on the earth like an abandoned child, alone, away from the other homes of the village. Old and sodden with shame from dilapidation and squalor. Everything about the dwelling, from its crack-ridden floor to its sagging roof and the dearth of its contents, told a rending story of poverty. Sinyangwe (2000, p.3)

This is not the only description that Sinyangwe gives of the impoverished state of Nasula. He states that "Nasula was poverty, she was loneliness and aloneness." Sinyangwe (2000, p.4). And all through the novel, Sinyangwe continuously reminds his readers of Nasula's poverty by making repeated statements where he uses poor as an adjective in describing Nasula. In subsequent pages Sinyangwe also describes Nasula's physical appearance in order that the imagery of Nasula's impoverished state can be pictured in the mind's eye of the reader.

This then raises the question—what is the reason for Nasula's poverty? Nasula answers this question by

reflecting on her life, and by reflection she identifies the reasons that have led to her being so poor. She identifies her lack of formal education which might have led her to a career path and her early “whirl-wind” marriage without first acquiring any trade or skill as the two major reasons for her poverty. And by this identification she is determined to see to it that her daughter, Sula, gets formal education. Because she believes it is one key way to her daughter’s independence and by such, an avoidance of the over reliance on men. She muses: “she had not tasted success in her own life, but she wanted her daughter to reach mountain peaks with her schooling and from there carve a decent living that would make it possible for her not to depend on a man for her existence.” Sinyangwe (2000, p.5)

If Nasula’s daughter has education, then she would be able to get a career later on and then be able to make her own money and thereby make her own decisions. Due to the fact that Nasula has no life skills or formal education, she is unable to leave her husband even when he humiliates her. Nasula recounts one such event: “when her pride had been injured beyond what she could bear,” Sinyangwe (2000, p.7) and so she decides to leave. But since she has no money, she asks Winelo for money for the bus fare back to her hometown. But Winelo refuses to give her the money. Nasula cries: “to bring 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” Sinyangwe (2000, p.7) But even after all these arguments she stays because she cannot afford, on her own, to leave.

There is a similar incidence in Mariama Ba’s novel, *So Long A letter*, however, the story is different in Assiatou’s case. Mawdo Ba who is from a higher social class marries Aissatou, although his mother opposes the marriage. When Mawdo takes a new wife, Aissatou leaves him. She moves on, studies further, and gets a job as an interpreter at the Senegalese Embassy in the US. Aissatou leaves her marriage with her four sons. And according to Ramatoulaye, Aissatou makes “a very good living.” Ba (1980, p.33) and this is possible because Aissatou has been economically empowered through her acquisition of formal education. Her economic freedom serves to liberate her from the polygamous marriage she is not willing to be part of.

Also, the European writer, Virginia Woolf, in a series of essays under the title, *A Room of one’s own*, states clearly that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (Woolf 1935) Basically Virginia Woolf was focused on discussing the challenges faced by women who wish to write fiction. However, that statement covers all aspects of challenges faced by women then and now. In fact, for the African woman to be anything or achieve anything other than being a “doll” as Henrik Ibsen presents the European woman in his play, *A Doll’s House*, she must strive to be more than just a wife.

Binwell Sinyangwe also uses the “doll” description in the same way, through his character, Nasula, as she laments on how her marriage to Winelo Chiswebe, turned her into a “doll without thoughts or feelings of her own.” Sinyangwe (2000, p.6) If this is the case, then it becomes certain that the African woman must “have money and a room of her own,” if she truly wants to be independent of a man.

As such, Nasula believes that for her daughter to have a “room and money of her own,” she must get formal education. Nasula believes that education is the key to her daughter gaining a better life; and this is the belief of Binwell Sinyangwe, the writer.

It is clear that Sinyangwe tackles the problem of African women from the core—the lack of formal education. Education presents ways of liberation for the African woman. The importance of educating women is stressed in a popular statement by the late Dr. Kwegir Aggrey: “if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation.” To understand what Aggrey meant is to understand the nature of the woman as a nurturer, a mother, a leader for all and not just a single individual. So in order to build the society the woman who is at the forefront of nurturing must equally be formally educated.

Similarly, Neshani Andreas, in her novel, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, looks at ways of liberation for the African woman already living in oppression within the social space. As such, she creates the character of Mee Fennie, the older aunt of Mee Kauna. Mee Fennie leaves an abusive marriage and decides to fend for herself and her three children. When Kauna visits her after not seeing her for three years, she sees that Mee Fennie’s life has improved. Mee Kauna observes that:

There had been some changes to the homestead since Kauna’s first visit. Then there had only been three huts, a kitchen and two bedrooms. Now, all of the children had their own huts, and Mee Fennie had built herself a concrete bedroom. Her livestock had also increased from two goats to seven, and from two cows to five. More purple and white violets had grown around the homestead. Andreas (2001, p.78)

These changes mentioned above are observed by Mee Kauna. It represents for the African woman the possibility of economic survival and prosperity. By presenting Mee Fennie, a divorced mother of four in this light, Neshani Andreas establishes the fact that it is possible for a woman to be single, and still be economically liberated. It all depends on the woman’s will power for survival and the community’s willingness to give her room to flourish. It is for this reason that in a culture where cattle is owned by men, and a symbol of male success, Mee Fennie, a woman, owns five cows. In a culture where the concrete house is built by men for themselves, and sometimes for their wives, Mee Fennie has built for herself a concrete bedroom. Mee Fennie represents hope for the woman who

is in an abusive relationship, but is afraid to leave because she does not believe that she can fend for herself, and not only survive, but actually succeed. As such, Mee Fennie is the opposite of Mee Kauna. Mee Kauna also observes that “more purple and white violets had grown around” Mee Fennie’s homestead. The growth of these flowers symbolise hope and a rebirth of life for Mee Fennie. They also symbolise the hope that is there for Mee Kauna to reach out to. And Mee Kauna keenly observes.

In previous visits Mee Fennie would always advise Mee Kauna to divorce Shange. But during Mee Kauna’s last visit Mee Fennie does not speak about the matter. It is as though the older woman who was in an abusive relationship is silently speaking to her young niece to observe her environment and prosperity and by so doing have faith that she too can make it without an abusive husband like Shange. It is based on these positive observations that Mee Kauna makes in her aunt’s homestead that she boldly takes her children and decides to return to her home town after Shange is buried. She tells Mee Ali, her friend that: “I don’t know what is out there for me and my children, but I will go, I am willing.” Andreas (2001, p.174) Mee Kauna is willing to go and start life all over again and has hope that she will succeed because she has an example in her own aunt, Mee Fennie. This goes to prove that the African woman has a strong will for survival and hope for a better future that negotiates for her equal social space within her environment or community.

Both writers are talking about the African woman and the challenges she is faced with. Whereas Binwell Sinyangwe identifies illiteracy as one key challenge facing the African woman, Neshani Andreas identifies oppressive cultural practises and human behaviour as key factors that also affect African women. As such, in Sinyangwe’s *Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula is determined to send her daughter Sula to school; and in Neshani Andreas’s, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Mee Kauna is determined to leave her abusive matrimonial home and make it on her own.

However, both writers clearly show that these two young African women are faced with opposition that threatens to derail their dreams, (for Nasula her dream is to see her daughter through school, and for Mee Kauna her dream is to be happy and fulfilled as a woman, wife and mother). The writers also indicate through their works that the opposition is gender based—the male figure stands as the opposition to the African woman’s dream of formal education, as well as societal or community based achievement. In Sinyangwe’s novel, this opposing male figure is first seen in the characters of Chiswebe and his son Isaki Chiswebe who leave Nasula a poor widow. Then the next opposing male figure is Gode, the fine looking man who steals her bag of beans. That bag of beans represents the hope of Sula’s future. When Gode steals it, he steals Nasula’s hope of sending her daughter to school. In Neshani Andreas’s novel, it is Mee Kauna’s husband, Shange, who stands as the force of opposition to Mee Kauna.

It is therefore obvious that both writers, Neshani Andreas and Binwell Sinyangwe are interested in identifying the cause of the African woman’s problems. The cause they find is the male figure. They both also give reasons as to why the male figure can be an opposition to the all-round development of the African woman—the reason both give is culturally based.

For instance, in Sinyangwe’s case, Nasula, per custom, must marry Isaki Chiswebe, if she is to survive as a widow. Her refusal to marry him leads to her defeat to poverty. Then, when she finally makes the liberating discovery that selling her bag of beans can send Sula to school, another male figure, Gode, shows up and steals her beans. In this instance, Gode also becomes a representation of a patriarchal society that oppresses female development. Culturally, the man commands respect for being male, he is the leader, and he is not to be questioned. So Nasula does not question him when he orders her to carry the bag of beans and follow him to his car. When he finally makes away with her bag of beans without paying for it, she is cautioned against pursuing the matter—Gode is a powerful man, a powerful thief, it is a man’s world.

Similarly, Neshani Andreas’s character, Mee Kauna, per custom, must mourn her dead husband and perform all the rites a widow must perform for a dead husband; even though the late husband in question was the worst kind of husband nobody would wish for. Even in death, Mee Kauna’s husband, Shange, is still tormenting her emotionally through the wrath of his family members who are demanding she fulfils her customary duties as widow for a husband who never showed her love but constantly abused her physically and emotionally. For example, when Mee Kiito, Shange’s first cousin, comes to Mee Kauna to ask her for the name of the person she has nominated to read her widow’s speech during the funeral, Mee Kauna replies that: “no, I will not have anybody say anything on my behalf. There is nothing to be said,” Andreas (2001, p.137) And Mee Kiito replies in anger:

You want to disgrace our clan. You want to demonstrate to the whole world what a horrible man my cousin was. You want this, is that not so? Haven’t you done enough damage to his name already by running around like a crazy freak broadcasting, for everybody to hear, that Shange had not slept at home the night before he died? I feel sorry for you, terribly sorry. Andreas (2001, p.138)

The above outburst by Mee Kiito is a clear indication of the male figure’s position as ‘oppressor’ due to some cultural practises executed by members of that culture with their own selfish or personal agenda lurking in the background of their intentions. Mee Kiito is quick to jump to the defence of a dead man who was a horrible

husband in life. In death, by nature of his sex, as a male, he is still to be revered. Her outburst shows that she conveniently ignores the underlining factor of Mee Kauna's running around screaming after her husband's death was just to absolve herself of all accusations as being the witch who has killed him. And in fact, the plot further reveals that Mee Kauna's "crazy freak broadcasting" of the circumstances surrounding her husband's death still does not absolve her from blame. Because from pages 97-100, Mee Kauna is summoned by her husband's family to explain the cause of his death. They ask accusing questions, blaming her for his death. For instance, they tell her: "as relatives of the deceased, we want to know how somebody who was not sick and did not complain of any illness died just like that, just like an animal" Andreas (2001, p.98) In fact, this statement clearly accuses Mee Kauna of having a hand in Shange's death.

After identifying the problem, these writers—Binwell Sinyangwe and Neshani Andreas employ the face of African womanism that seeks for negotiation between the sexes—males and females, as a way to find solutions to the problems created by men but endured by women. The scenarios created by both writers are not just meant to blame the male figure and as such, create unnecessary hatred and dislike for the African male figure; because that is not the aim of this face of African womanism—and this is not to say that it is the aim of any feminine movement. The aim of this face of African womanism is to identify the problem; and as such, in both novels the writers identify the male figure as the problem, then after identifying the problem, they give some portion of the responsibility to solving the problem to those who have created the problem in the first place—the male figure. So for instance, Neshani Andreas' narrator of the story, Mee Ali, is married to a good man, Michael. Mee Ali recalls how her husband shielded her from the fierce opposition of his family members at the early stages of their marriage. Mee Ali recalls: "you should have seen my husband – his behaviour reminded me of the way my brothers used to protect me at school against the bullies, so that later I could stick out my tongue to them" Andreas (2001, p.18) Neshani Andreas suggests through her character, Michael, that although it is a patriarchal society, a change that seeks for equal treatment for both sexes is achievable if the privileged sex steps up to correct the social anomaly of discrimination and mistreatment of women.

Similarly, in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula finds her liberation within that same stringent and unfriendly patriarchal space. For instance, when Nasula loses her bag of beans at the market, another male trader at the market who the writer refers to as the man from Solwezi tells Nasula and Nalukwi:

Friends it is my prayer that you will not be offended... Friends we are strangers to each other, but we are children of the same creator and victims of the same fate here on earth; therefore, we are not strangers in the real sense. We are one and the same. A person who does not see the world in that way is not a human being. You and me are of one family. It is so. What happened today, your spirits and mine, have brought us together and made us one. We have come to know each other and therefore must suffer tribulation together as one family. Sinyangwe (2000, p.93)

In the above lines, the man from Solwezi makes a most important statement that can be summed up as the writer's thematic statement—"we are one and the same. A person who does not see the world in that way is not a human being." This is a man, calling two women he has only just met, 'friends.' His use of the word, 'friendship' represents the opening up of a closed patriarchal space that alienates women—he breaks that patriarchal barrier in order to welcome in these two women—Nasula and Nalukwi.

The man from Solwezi also emphasises the basic humanity of all when he says: "we are one and the same." He does not create distinctions among the sexes. For him, males and females are one and the same. We are both driven by the same impulses of humanity—love, hope, faith, togetherness, death and life. Perhaps Sinyangwe does not give this important character a name because he is meant to be a representation of man, and all that can be good and should be good in men. He represents the "every man" in the African society.

The statement enforcing friendship and a shared humanity that the man from Solwezi makes is no different from what Mariama Ba's character, Ramatoulaye, in *So Long a Letter*, makes in her letter to her friend, Aissatou: "we walked the same paths from adolescence to maturity, where the past begets the present. My friend, my friend, my friend. I call on you three times." Ba (1980, p.1) This show of friendship is one of the major subject matters that African womanism which calls for renegotiation of social spaces relies heavily on. The social space can be equally shared by men and women.

Also, Binwell Sinyangwe's character, Samson Luhila, the chief of police, also represents authority. It is he who steps in to save Nasula and give her justice when Gode Silwawe manages to bribe his way out of police custody when he is brought in by a young police man. Perhaps the writer gives Samson a name, in order to make him stand out, because as a writer, Binwell acknowledges that it is not only a selfish or manipulated cultural system that beats down the African woman, but also corrupt public systems, such as the police force also contributes further to the beating down of the African woman. In giving this character, the name Samson; which is in itself a symbolic allusion to the biblical character of Samson, one of the judges who defends Israel against their relentless enemies—the Philistines; Binwell Sinyangwe advocates the need for those male individuals who find themselves in leadership positions that have been corrupted to still stand up and become the catalysts for positive change that seeks to liberate the oppressed—in this instance, the African woman.

In addition, African womanism believes in the existence of natural roles. As such, women are naturally created to be mothers and to nurture society. Men represent family heads and take up roles of material and emotional provisions. This is evident in how Neshani Andreas presents her character, Mee Fennie. Mee Fennie is presented as a successful divorced woman. But she still holds on to cultural practises and beliefs that she identifies with. For instance, she still believes that the position of a male in the family is important. This is why when Mee Kauna visits, Mee Fennie refers to her young son (Mee Fennie's son) as "the man of the house." Andreas (2001, p.78) Mee Fennie also complains bitterly about her brother, Samwele, who is always drunk and irresponsible and as such cannot represent the family at important gatherings and this is something that greatly worries Mee Fennie because she complains about her brother's inability to be a leader more than once in the novel. Mee Fennie even stops Samwele from attending the funeral of Mee Kauna's husband because: "he was just going to get drunk and disgrace all of us." Andreas (2001, p.122) Mee Fennie appoints "herself spokesperson for the family" so that their irresponsible men do not embarrass them. Mee Kauna tells Mee Ali that when Mee Fennie:

Divorced her husband, the village people and all the prophets of doom, including her own relatives, predicted her downfall and her children starving. Nothing like that happened. She put her first daughter through high school and she is now at the University of Namibia studying administration. Her other daughter and son are both doing well. I sometimes wish she was my mother or at least that mother was a bit more like her. Andreas (2001, p.126)

It is clear that Mee Kauna admires her aunt, Mee Fennie, because she has succeeded in blending her natural role as a mother with her economic venture as a trader and her social status as a divorced woman. Mee Kauna sees in Mee Fennie the possibility of still being a successful mother and achieving economic empowerment without a man.

In fact, both writers place importance on the natural role of a woman as a mother because it is a role that the African woman places a high premium on. The subject matter of motherhood is important. This is clearly depicted in Lola Shoneyins' novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Three of Segi's wives—Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi, go ahead to have children who are fathered by other men even when they know that their husband is incapable of having children. This happens as a result of the importance society places on motherhood and some African women, even without the pressures of society will not accept that they cannot perform their natural roles as mothers.

Similarly, in Efua Theodora Sutherland's play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Anansewa is excited when her father, Ananse, informs her that she is to marry Chief-who-is-Chief. She is suddenly agitated when she discovers that her father has promised her to four different chiefs. Her interest is in Chief-who-is-Chief. Anansewa is excited when her puberty rite is performed because it indicates that she is now ready to marry. Her peers who come to grace the performance of her puberty rites cheer her on with: "Anansewa, you are now ready to marry. Anansewa, you will give birth to thirty." Sutherland (1987, p.49) Anansewa confirms her excitement when she says: "I never imagined that this ceremony will touch me so much. I have a lovely feeling inside my heart." Sutherland, (1987, p.53) The importance of the natural role of motherhood is stressed when the girls tell Anansewa that she would give birth to thirty. The excitement the performance of the puberty rites brings Anansewa is a confirmation of the importance of culture to the African woman. African womanism draws attention to the fact that the African woman is seeking liberation within her cultural space. The African woman does not want to be totally alienated from her cultural space. But she also wants to renegotiate her freedom and identity.

Also, Buchi Emecheta's novel, *Joys of Motherhood*, stresses on the natural role of womanhood. When Nnu Ego tries to commit suicide by jumping down from a bridge in Lagos, Nwakuor, her kinsman, stops her. He asks her: "what are you trying to do to your husband, your father, your people and your son who is only a few weeks old? You want to kill yourself, eh? Who is going to look after your baby for you? You are shaming your womanhood, shaming your motherhood." Emecheta (1979, p.64) Another Ibo woman slaps her for attempting suicide when she has a baby at home. It is then that she informs them that she is: "not a woman anymore! I am not a mother anymore! The child is there, dead on the mat." Emecheta (1979, p.65) And according to Buchi Emecheta the onlookers: "all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman." Emecheta (1979, p.65) It can be concluded that Nnu Ego probably condemns herself as a failed mother because the society will condemn her as such. However we cannot ignore the underlining factor that there are African women who desire to fulfil their natural roles as women and as mothers. As such, African womanism is of the view that although a woman without children must not be maligned by society and seen as failed, we must not also lose sight of the fact that there are African women who consider this role as their natural mandate and believe that they must be appreciated whether or not they are able to fulfil their role as mothers.

Conclusion

As such, it is important to understand that African womanism seeks to renegotiate the place of the African woman within her social, cultural and economic space. African feminism is not incoherent as scholars like Regina Ode asserts in their work, *Women, their own worst enemies; a comparative study of Tess Onwueme's "Tell it to the women" and "The reign of wazobia."* Regina Ode identifies that western feminism have all come to the single

conclusion that women are oppressed based on their sexes. However she believes that African feminism is yet to reach such a conclusion.

However, African womanism understands and accepts the fact that women are oppressed as a result of their sex. The difference however lies in the fact that African womanism believes that each group of African women or even individual African women first and foremost define oppression based on their sex; and secondly begins to define oppression based on diverse socio-economic and cultural experiences received from different angles and situations. Therefore there is the need to take into consideration the fact that there are diverse cultural beliefs and practises and as such, the definition for liberation or emancipation cannot have a single idea if the intent is to rope in all women. And this is because cultural diversity creates the differences in what different groups of women consider to be oppressive cultural practises. Therefore the struggle of 'African female activists' groups which Regina Ode describes as 'African feminism' is not incoherent. It is actually African womanism and African womanism is coherent and inclusive.

As a result of this inclusive nature of African womanism it becomes imperative that for instance, if the woman wearing the hijab sees it as her pride and symbol of 'status' then it must be respected as such for her. In another breath, if another woman sees that same hijab as a symbol of female oppression, then she must have the free hand to be rid of it. This clearly suggests that individual and group responses to matters considered as oppressive is vital to the definition of what is oppressive at any point in time.

Therefore, these two writers, Binwell Sinyangwe and Neshani Andreas, in their own unique ways define African womanism as an ideology which believes that in order to save the woman, the man must take responsibility for the part he has played in bringing her down. Then he must help her up. This is because African womanism seeks to hold on to the positive aspects of diverse African cultures. The culture per say, might not be bad in all instances. However it is those who are practising these diverse cultures that have made it bad, so as to serve their own selfish interests. No single ideology can set African women free because each group of women define freedom differently. Their cultural backgrounds, their varied interests and intents makes their struggles different. As such, African womanism calls for negotiation between the sexes—males and females in whatever cultural and socio-economic space they find themselves.

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