

A Comparative Study of Widows' Plight in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims at making a comparative study of widows' plight in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*. The plight of African widows is deplorable in African societies where the weight of customs and traditions makes them suffer a lot. In those societies, the maltreatment that men inflict on them is usually inhumane. People even suspect them of being at the origin of their husbands' death in most cases. Such a situation calls for reflection as it has become a societal problem which deserves a particular attention. Hence the necessity to carry out this research work in order to pinpoint the ins and outs of such a phenomenon through a comparative study of widows' plight in the selected novels. The methodological approach that I have used in this research work is documentary research. The study has found that the two widows have a similar plight as courageous and resilient women although their situations are not exactly the same in some aspects. The literary theories that I have applied to the study are feminism, a literary theory which aims at revaluing women's image, and the Marxist critical approach which focusses on class struggle.

Keywords: Widows, plight, maltreatment, inhumane, phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the plight of two African widows who have stood alone in society to face all the obstacles that come through their paths and live the life they desire. Widowhood practices as they occur in African societies are deplorable since they make widows suffer a lot. The cases of the two protagonist widows in the two novels under study is very telling. The first widow, Nasula, is the protagonist of *A Cowrie of Hope*, a novel written by Binwell Sinyangwe, a Zambian novelist. The second one, Yaremi, is the protagonist of *Lonely Days* written by the Nigerian author, Bayo Adebowale. So, it is clear that the two widows belong to two different African communities, and they have both suffered enormously of African widowhood practices. The research work is articulated around three sections. The first section is "The Widows' Hardships through False Accusations", the second section is "The Widows' Struggle for Survival", and the third one is "The Question of the Widows' Remarriage and the Reasons for their Rejection of Remarriage."

The Widows' Hardships through false Accusations

Nasula and Yaremi come from two different countries. The former comes from Zambia whereas the latter comes from Nigeria. It means that the two novels under study are set in two different ethnic communities. Nasula belongs to the Lunda ethnic community of Zambia whereas Yaremi belongs to the Yoruba ethnic community of Nigeria. Despite that fact, they have almost faced the same plight after their respective husbands' death, namely Winelo Chiswebe and Ajumobi. Their predicament is microcosm of what widows endure in African communities. The first hardship that they generally face is the false accusation according to which they are responsible for their husbands' death through witchcraft. No man dies a natural death once he is married in Africa; his widow is always the scapegoat.

The circumstances of Winelo Chiswebe's death in *A Cowrie of Hope* (subsequently referred to as *ACH* followed by page numbers in quotations) are completely different from Ajumobi's in *Lonely Days* (subsequently referred to as *LD* followed by page numbers in quotations). Policemen have shot Nasula's husband, Winelo Chiswebe, dead when he is stealing with his friends. In fact, he works in a company which repairs vehicles and sells spare parts of machines. The first time his company has caught him, together with his friends, stealing in a van, they have sacked him. Seven months later, the policemen kill him in another theft. So, it is crystal clear that he has died through theft. However, his relatives accuse Nasula of being responsible for his death simply because she has nobody to stand for her. The following quotation is a proof of her false accusation: "How they turned against her. Blamed 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?" (*ACH*, p. 8). That quotation highlights widows' sad plight in a community where male chauvinism is prevalent. In fact, people unjustly accuse Nasula of murder simply because she has nobody to defend her. Mutunda (2017 b, p. 55) corroborates the idea when he writes:

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 above-mentioned quotation clearly implies that Winelo Chiswebe is involved in clandestine night activities, that is to say in robbery. It means that his wife is not responsible for his death as her in-laws pretend. Through the widow's false accusation, the novelist, Sinyangwe, intends to denounce the social injustice which causes people to accuse innocent widows of killing their husbands. Since Nasula has serious problems due to her poverty, her husband's death constitutes another serious problem for her. The narrator of *A Cowrie of Hope* puts great emphasis on her poverty and the other troubles that she daily faces by describing her as follows:

Nasula was poverty. She was loneliness and aloneness. 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. (pp. 4-5)

As it can be seen in the aforementioned quotation, Nasula is extremely poor. It is evident that after her husband's death, she has no means and no dependable support. Since her husband has fended for her and her daughter, Sula, so far, there is no reason why she should opt to kill her husband, not even through witchcraft. In addition, she is parentless and relies on her husband only for her survival up to his death.

As far as Yaremi's husband, Ajumobi, is concerned in *Lonely Days*, he has apparently died a natural death. The novelist reveals that he has complained of a headache after his return from the farm; then, he goes to bed and never wakes up. Coincidentally, that night, the people of Kufi, his native village, heard a hawk hooting on an iroko tree. As a result, suspicion spreads that Ajumobi has not died a natural death. So, like Nasula, Yaremi's husband's people try to find a scapegoat by overtly accusing her of being at the origin her husband's death. The following quotation unveils the false accusation: "This woman has killed her husband! She turned into a hawk and killed her man! That's not an ordinary bird, for sure, on the roof of the house" (*LD*, p. 43). Through this false accusation, Adebowale shows how superstitious beliefs lead people to wrongly accuse widows not only in the Yoruba community which he belongs to, but also in Africa at large. Even before Yaremi's overt accusation, the narrator of the novel tells us how the 'sympathisers' treat her in the quotation below:

She was scanned by mourners in all directions. All eyes followed every footstep she took with hostile closeness. And all ears listened, ready to catch her every word in a set-trap. These, obviously, were not people merely sitting in silent sympathy in the presence of death, but people who were fully bent on humiliating her and destroying her reputation. (LD, p. 3)

That quotation reveals that even the mourners are keen on humiliating Yaremi and on destroying her reputation because they believe that she is responsible for her husband's death. Despite her innocence, she is prosecuted by the mourners who look down on her as a scapegoat to incriminate for Ajumobi's death. Moreover, her deceased husband's extended family members play ball by maltreating her in their turn: "Then followed, after few days the extended family's mockery heaped on her like the strange showers of a January rain" (*LD*, pp. 3-4). Olugunle (2018, p. 137) expatiates on this fact in these terms:

The image of violence and maltreatment the widows usually receive from the members of the extended family of the deceased, usually few days after the burial of the dead is carefully painted. Yaremi, still marooned in her cocoon of solitude, loneliness and aloofness, receives the maltreatment and domestic violence she suffers from the extended family with insults, mockery and abusive words on her [...].

In the foregoing quotation, Olugunle deplors the maltreatment and domestic violence that Yaremi's deceased husband's extended family members have wrongly heaped on her. Although Winelo and Ajumobi have died under clear circumstances, their parents and relatives overtly accuse the two defenceless widows of being responsible for their death. Nasula and Yaremi's humiliation and loneliness are a microcosm of widows' plight in African communities. Both Nasula and Yaremi feel lonely and suffer not only morally but also physically. The narrator of *Lonely Days* refers to Yaremi in these terms: "Yaremi's eyes twinkled. She did not know whether to begin to shed tears of

sorrows or tears of gratitude. It must be tears of sorrows. Sorrows from the abyss of a troubled heart. Yaremi's face instantly shadowed in deep misery, and the whole world immediately went blank before her eyes" (*LD*, p. 1). This passage shows how Yaremi's husband's death has shaken her.

Nasula's and Yaremi's husbands' death is upsetting and it is the worst thing that can happen in their lives. So, a disastrous widowhood has started for them. Their daily lives are full of fears, sadness, regrets, sorrows and thoughts. Sossou, (2002, p. 202) posits that: "For all women, the death of the husband has an extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, friend and a breadwinner, but it also results in a radical change in a woman's social status and lifestyle." Her position is relevant insofar as it clearly corroborates what the two writers are endeavouring to pinpoint through their novels. It is clear that the two women's social status and lifestyles have radically changed as soon as they have become widows. For instance, Nasula does not hesitate to venture in the deep forest alone in quest for financial assistance for her daughter's education due to her new social status as a lonely widow. The quotation below sums up this sad fact:

The woman walked. She walked and walked, along a meandering footpath. Grains of sand in size and colour brought to her mind the sight and smell of roasted finger millet. The forest on both sides was dense, full of virginity, and a still silence as uncanny as that of the land of the dead. In the ghostly womb of untampered nature, the woman walked the distance to Mangano. Alone, unescorted by man. Nasula was courage. (ACH, p. 14)

In the above quotation, Sinyangwe compares the forest in which Nasula ventures to the land of the dead. This comparison clearly shows the extent to which the widow's plight leads her to do things that she would not have done if her husband had not died. Her plight has created a kind of unmatched courage in her. She suffers from moral disturbances, stress and depression which cause her to feel an utter anxiety. The narrator of *A Cowrie of Hope* expresses this through the following passage: "With the large part of her journey behind her, tension and anxiety began to grip Nasula. It was painful to go to Mangano to see Isaki Chiswebe over money for Sula's schooling" (*ACH*, p. 19). Needless to say, the fact that Nasula seeks for her in-laws' help for her daughter's school fees shows her financial difficulties after her husband's death. Like Nasula, Yaremi is filled with anxiety after her husband's death as it appears through this quotation: "A body of water settled inside Yaremi's eyes like a lake. It rolled down her cheeks in rivulets and broke off into tributaries. These were tears of anxiety and fear" (*LD*, p. 117). The two widows present strange mental and physical behaviour because they permanently bear the fact that they are lonely widows in mind. It is a kind of trauma which forcibly reflects on their behaviour. While comparing Yaremi's tears to a body of water settling inside her eyes like a lake, the writer shows the extent of her anxiety and fear.

In *Lonely Days*, apart from Yaremi, Adebowale describes the pains and the humiliation which other widows, namely Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke, have undergone. People have also accused those three widows of being responsible of their husbands' death. For instance, Dedewe is used to crying all night, brooding over the humiliation that she has suffered at the hands of her husband's relatives. The following quotation is an illustration:

Confess, confess, confess. Ask your husband to have mercy. Kneel down and beg him for forgiveness. Confess Dedewe, to avoid the punishment of heaven. The punishment of heaven comes down furiously and mercilessly like burning inferno. The guilty ones cannot escape it! Confess Dedewe. To the sin of jealousy and to the sin of adultery. The

sin of defamation and disparagement. Those big lies you used to tell against him to spoil his good name! (LD, p. 26)

The aforementioned quotation shows the way people have tortured Dedewe through the confession of her supposed sins. They have gone too far by locking her up with her husband's corpse, hoping that her deceased husband will kill her as a result of her guilt. This superstitious belief proves to be fruitless since nothing has happened to the poor widow who is thoroughly innocent.

Fayoyin, the second widow, is another victim. People give her libation to lick when her husband has died, hoping to purge her of all the sins that they think she too has committed. As if this were not enough, they bring her before the mourners who sit with dark brooding faces, looking lost and unhappy. Out of hatred for her, people go beyond the dictates of their culture as they sprinkle cold water on her hair and summon a barber who quickly sets to business. He props Fayoyin's head between his thighs, clenches his teeth, and begins scraping away with a 'sharp crocodile nacet' blade. The elders prop the barber up through the following words:

Cut the hair down to the roots. Even if the skin on the head has to be bruised in the process! Bruise it, for goodness sake! We hope your razor is sharp enough to do the job the way we want it done? Cut this woman's totally down to her scalp! Sprinkle her head with wood ash and oil it with paraffin ointment. (LD, p. 27)

That quotation shows how inhumane the ill-treatment that people have inflicted on that innocent widow is. By the time the barber finishes cutting her hair, Fayoyin's appearance has terribly altered. Through the maltreatment of the character of Fayoyin, the novelist, Adebowale, unveils the extent to which the pains inflicted on widows in the Yoruba community are generally oppressive, humiliating and dehumanising. He thus advocates the revaluation of women's image as suggested by the feminist literary theory.

When her beloved husband dies, the third widow, Radeke, kneels before his corpse and sings the widow's traditional song of innocence and lamentation to prove her innocence. Despite her plea, people curse the killer whom they think she is. The narrator tells us about it in these terms:

Darkness never ends for the rodent entrapped inside a calabash container. Forever the killer will be hungry and be perpetually in debt. She will be ridiculed in public places like a lunatic. Like a ram caught in the thicket, she will remain immobile. Not progressing. Not retrogressing. Just waiting confused, at the crossroads of life! (LD, p. 28)

Although there is not clear hint that the personal pronoun 'she' mentioned in the foregoing quotation refers to Radeke, any informed reader should know that it tacitly refers to her. Things become clear as the narrator goes on further to tell us that: "They cursed the woman they thought was the killer of Radeke's husband all through eyeing Radeke's herself suspiciously" (*Lonely Days*, p. 28). A major problem that Kufi faces as a village is that most deaths are not tagged as natural, especially if it happens to be a woman's husband. RAIMI (2016, p. 717) highlights this aspect when he writes:

In a couple, a partners' death marks the beginning of the other's suffering. The wife particularly is counted among the suspected persons of the death in spite of the pain of the loss she feels. Although she is openly accused, the reality is that the family-in-law still wants a proof that she is not the killer.

The above quotation refers to Yaremi and the other widows, Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke, in *Lonely Days*. People subject them to various forms of humiliation and torture, including things like confessing to gods for the death of their deceased husbands, taking libation, having heads completely shaved, and remaining in isolation for long periods of time. So, Olugunle (2018, pp. 136-137) is right when he deplores widows' plight in the African society, through the case of Yaremi and the other widows in *Lonely Days*, in these terms:

What is in vogue in the African society is that when a man dies, the wife is put through all manners of abuse. She is always the prime suspected killer or the cause of the death of her husband. She is made go through some horrible, terrible and dehumanising rituals. Tant pis for her if she gave birth to only female child/children. She will be stripped of all her husband's belongings. Bayo Adebawale paints in Lonely [Days]. He presents Yaremi, the main character and three other senior widows; Radeke, Fafoyin and Dedewe to show the reality of this phenomenon in Africa, who are targets of repression and hostility, forever leading a life of aloofness – subdued, silenced, subalternised and humiliated. Their rights are trampled upon by the custodians of tradition.

The aforementioned quotation shows the dehumanising character of widows' plight in the African society. However, unlike her three peers, Yaremi stands for herself by refusing to give way to customs and traditions which she thinks are obsolete. The absence of their husbands, taken away from them by untimely death, has led to Nasula and Yaremi's inevitable struggle for survival.

The Widows' Struggle for Survival

The Situation just after their Husbands' Death

People blame both Nasula and Yaremi for the death of their husbands as mentioned earlier. Nasula's in-laws accuse her of her husband's death as soon as she refuses to get married to Isaki Chiswebe, her deceased husband's younger brother, who has already got three wives, through levirate. Before his death, Winelo Chiswebe has asked for a pen and a paper to write that his house including the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* is for his wife and his daughter. Unfortunately, his people opt to deprive Nasula of this inheritance and send her away with her daughter simply because she has resisted levirate. The following quotation illustrates this sad fact: "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 founds money for her travel and returned to the village" (ACH, p. 9). Through this ordeal, Sinyangwe intends to reveal widows' sad plight in the Zambian community and in African communities at large. This raises the problem of the difficulties that widows face in African societies as far as property inheritance is concerned as it appears in the quotation below:

In the Nigerian society, as in many other African societies, human greed exists in many families and the death of a male member of a family offers an opportunity to the other male members of the extended family to increase their holding of the scarce and inelastic commodity which is land. The commodity now in question can expand to other items of properties. Its acquisition, that is the scarce commodity, land, basically controls the treatment of the widow. The implication of this is that the in-laws could throw the widows and their children out or falsely accuse them of killing their husbands so as to acquire the late man's properties and land. All other activities serve the same purpose and any mystification and other ritual and superstitious sanctions are geared towards

the oppression of widows. The Nigerian widow, in the course of fulfilling funerals rites, is subjected to a greater agony than the grief of the loss of her husband. (Akinbi, 2015, p. 68)

The foregoing quotation reveals that because of the properties left by the deceased man, his parents and relatives generally send the widow and her children away, pretexting that she has killed her husband because of the bequeathed properties. For instance, in *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula's in-laws have sent her away with her daughter not only because she has failed to marry her late husband's brother but also because they want to take all her properties.

As far as Yaremi is concerned, she has not gone through the same fate as Nasula. This is due to fact that her in-laws have not imposed remarriage on her and let her stay in her deceased husband's house. However, although her in-laws have not forced her to remarry a close relative of her late husband through levirate, she has to choose a suitor as required by the customs and traditions of the community which she belongs to. As a matter of fact, the community organises a yearly ceremony for widows to give them the opportunity to pick a suitor for remarriage. This ceremony is not the only traditional widowhood practice Yaremi has gone through. This is justified by the fact that just after her husband's death, people have shaven her head, and she has passed several months in black clothes. Such practices, peddled in African communities, in the name of customs and traditions, are awkward and obsolete.

People accuse Nasula and Yaremi of their husbands' death because in Africa, no one dies a natural death. Instances of this are provided in both novels: "How they turn against her. Blamed 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" (*ACH*, p. 8). "When the people saw the hawk which perched on the roof of Ajumobi's house on the day Ajumobi died, their suspicion was confirmed. This woman has killed her husband." (*LD*, p. 43). Blaming Nasula and Yaremi for their husbands' death is really frustrating. Except some little problems which occur in any couple, they have been on good terms with their husbands. So, there is no reason why they should kill them.

Other bad widowhood practices occur in *Lonely Days* through the characters of Dedeye and Fayoyin, Yaremi's friends who are widows too. Like Yaremi, they are victims of traditions. For instance, Dedeye's in-laws deliberately lock her in a room with her husband's corpse and they ask her to confess her sins simply because they believe that she is responsible for his death. In the same vein, Fayoyin's in-laws decide to give her libation to lick, and to shave her head off. This is a token that widows' in-laws generally subject them to several humiliating practices which amount to moral and physical torture. Those dehumanising practices negatively impact widows' lives socially, psychologically and economically. Socially, people consider them as unclean women and consequently despise them. Others think that they are cursed women and start ostracising them, and they consequently end up finding themselves alone. Psychologically, they feel oppressed by the rituals, accusations and injuries they are victims of. Economically, they are bound to stop their business for a long period corresponding to the mourning period because they are not free of their movement. Nasula and Yaremi have economic activities and other responsibilities after the mourning period and seek, so-so, to establish an equilibrium in society.

The Widows' Economic Activities and other Responsibilities

The two widows, Nasula and Yaremi, not only do their own duties, but they also do the duties that their husbands would do if they were alive. For instance, they both work hard in farms for several hours in the hot sun and raise crops by themselves. Nasula is used to borrowing fertiliser and maize seeds since she has no money to buy them. She is supposed to pay back in the harvest she will get. Unfortunately, the rain is not enough and the harvest is bad. The agent fails to understand the poor lady and takes almost all the harvest and leaves her and her daughter in food shortage just one month after the harvest. Sidi Chabi & Aguessy (2018, p. 111) deplore the situation after she has returned from her in-laws empty-handed in these words: "Returning home empty-handed, Nasula decides to take another gamble for her daughter. She decides against common sense to borrow seed and fertiliser from the shrewd Pupila, hoping to pay him off and sell the excess produce at a profit."

The narrator of *Lonely Days* reveals how Yaremi toils to raise crops after her husband's death through this passage: "Now alone in the world, Yaremi was left to prepare heaps and raise crops, all by herself – laboring hour after hour, under the sweltering heat" (*LD*, p. 5). Through the quotation, Adebowale deplores widows' neglect or rejection by their communities. Nasula's situation as far as farming is concerned is more sorrowful than Yaremi's as it appears in that quotation. Apart from farming, the two widows do other petty jobs to make both ends meet. For example, Nasula is used to doing pieces of work like working in other people's farms, cutting thatching grass for food, money, cloths and other essential things that she and her daughter need because her farm fails to support them. Since she has no alternative left, she accepts old baskets, old cloths and old plates that she can neither use nor sell as the reward of the work she does for people. As far as Yaremi is concerned, she sells taffeta cloths apart from farming. She usually prepares these cloths two days before the market day. She and her little grandson, Woye, beat the cloth during many hours and dye it in indigo solution. Then, they pack the cloths in trays and walk more than three miles to market in the intention of selling them for cash money. Unfortunately, that business is not fruitful because most of her customers buy on credit. Owen (1996, quoted by Sossou, 2002, p. 206) rightly posits that:

The economic survival of West African widows after the death of their spouses is also of crucial importance. Though studies have confirmed the economic self-reliance of women through their substantial contribution to their household economy, many widows are reduced to poverty as a result of being evicted from their homes and losing their property to often ruthless in-laws.

Although the foregoing quotation refers to West African widows, its content is true of the rest of Africa, especially black Africa. The way the two widows suffer for their survival shows that the social systems of widowhood in the two communities depicted in the two novels under study are too rigid. The two novelists thus denounce the rigidity of those social systems of widowhood not only in their respective communities but also in the other African communities. This allegation is justified by the fact that the social systems as far as widows are concerned are common to most African countries as it can be seen in the quotation below:

The three social systems of Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire have determined what widows can do or cannot do in the economy through customary laws on inheritance and remarriages. However, the support system, which formed the basis of widow sustenance in the past, has given way to more individualised survival systems. All the same, the customary laws and rules, which determined the system of inheritance of assets and

property, have not changed so much. Customary rules of inheritance as well as right to use properties have placed widows in very difficult situations. Rules and regulations relating to the use of land for agriculture have remained unchanged over time. Consequently, trading or paid employment has become an important supplementary source of income for widows' survival. (Sossou, 2002, pp. 206-207)

The aforementioned quotation clearly shows the extent to which those social systems are rigid. Consequently, the widows' precarious living conditions are the result of the inconsistency of their economic activities. They live in poor conditions. Nasula's case is a perfect example. Her house reflects poverty as she desperately says: "A few of the beans we ate yesterday remains in the broken clay pot" (*ACH*, p. 17). The following quotation further highlights her poverty: "Outside, using an old knife without a handle, she Nasula cut off the chicken's head and threw its body into shallow tin by the doorside" (*ACH*, p. 46). Nasula is so poor that she is not able to have the minimum kitchen utensils. She uses a broken clay pot and a tin for cooking because she has no money to offer herself some new utensils. In addition, her poverty is reflected in her way of clothing. Anyway, Yaremi is far better than Nasula in terms of poverty since she is not so poor as Nasula.

Apart from the widow's economic activities, they have other responsibilities that they ensure. For instance, Nasula has taken the responsibility of her daughter's schooling. In a conversation with her daughter, she laments: "You must go to school. You can't stop your schooling just like that [...]. Do you not see how we are suffering because I did not go to school? You want your future to be like this?" (37). Sidi Chabi & Aguessy (2018, p. 94) comment on her perception of education in spite of her illiteracy in these terms:

Despite her illiteracy and hard living conditions, she perceives education as the only weapon to her daughter's salvation. She decides that her daughter should go to school after noticing that some women are emancipated around her simply because they are educated. As a good mother, she senses that education is a good thing for her daughter as it has been for the educated women around her.

Nasula is so determined about her daughter's education that she raises one hundred and fifty *kwacha* to send her to school. She first goes to her in-laws' village at Mangano. She walks for a whole day, hoping to get her in-laws' financial assistance, but she is disappointed. She is unable to get even what to eat before her return to Swelini, her native village, because her brother-in-law, Isaki Chiswebe, fails to give her money. She eventually decides to go and sell her only bag of beans at a nearby market. Unfortunately, once she gets there, she is cheated of her bag of beans and passes a whole week searching for the thief. She sleeps in the market without being able to get water to take her bath in her determination to deal with the thief and recover her beans or the money for them. Through this sacrifice, Sinyangwe portrays Nasula as a resilient woman who is keen on making her only daughter's future prosperous. Mutunda (2017 a, p. 106) substantiates that fact in these terms:

The novel tells the story of a young widowed village woman 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. Her inability to support her child's education seems to extinguish her hope. However, a friend, Nalukwi advises her 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 retrieves after overcoming a series of tribulations.

The foregoing quotation shows that Nasula does not want to come to terms with her poverty; on the contrary, she fights in order to overcome it with all her might. She is even ready to deal with Gode Silavwe, the thief, despite people's attempt to dissuade her as the narrator puts it: "What did it matter if Gode was death itself. The man had stolen her only hope of salvation, which lay in her daughter's schooling. She must look for him and she would pursue him to her death, if that was what he wanted. The pain of her loss called to her and she would rise to its call" (ACH, p. 115). As a result, "Nasula struggles, searching for Gode in the entire market for six days with little food and without any care for her looks. She knows that finding Gode and the bag of beans is the only source of survival for her and her daughter" (Mutunda, 2017 b, p. 108). This is an illustration of her resilience. When she finally finds Gode Silavwe, the ensuing fight is so fierce that (Aguessy, 2014, p. 81) likens it to an epic fight: "Gode's violent reaction leads to an epic fight that one would qualify as the fight between David and Goliath in the Holy Bible."

As far as Yaremi is concerned, she has not known such a disastrous situation, even though both widows always work hard from sunrise to sunset and even at night. Her leitmotiv is: "Never leave till tomorrow what you could do today. Today is sure [...]. But nobody knows what tomorrow will bring" (LD, p. 7). Instead of discouraging themselves and losing hope, Nasula and Yaremi indulge in resilience to cope with the situation. According Lothar et al., (2000, p. 858), quoted by Cloete & Mlambo (2014, p. 93):

Resilience is explained as a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma. This term does not represent a personality trait or an attribute of the individual, rather, it is a two-dimensional construct that implies exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes.

In addition, Mlambo (2011) posits that "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. 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." Elsewhere he declares that "Resilience, therefore, emphasises the strength that the people have rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit" (Mlambo, 2014, p. 39). It is therefore evident that both Nasula and Yaremi are resilient widows in their quest for justice and survival at all costs. For that reason, they endeavour to manage their husbands' physical absence.

The Widows' Management of their Husbands' Physical Absence

Nasula and Yaremi are alone and abandoned because of their husbands' physical absence. However, they endeavour to replace that physical absence with their psychological presence through the use of abstract means. For instance, Nasula thinks about her late husband when the moment to raise her daughter's school fees comes:

Her thoughts suddenly became too painful. She tried to put them behind her. The fire before and below her outstretched hands disappeared. A darkness covered her and the image of Winelo filled her mind strongly built dark-skinned flat-nosed large horn-like

ears and sharp, inquisitive eyes. A human being who surely could not have stolen or told a lie or belittle a wife and boasted about what he gave her and did for her she stared long at him he became alive and real she could smile and feel him her emotion rose higher and she wept and whispered silently help me father of Sula. The child must go to school. Help me with money for her school or I shall die of this pain. The ulcer of poverty is burning deep. (ACH, p. 10)

That quotation shows that Nasula begs for help from her husband in spite of his physical absence. If he were alive, Nasula would probably contribute to their daughter's school fees, but she would never search for it alone. In her plight, she begs for her deceased husband's help because she has nobody to rely on. In other words, everybody has thoroughly abandoned her. In the same vein, Yaremi undergoes a similar situation as the narrator of *Lonely Days* says: "Yaremi felt thoroughly abandoned like a stone at the bottom of a lake, silence sinks like sad music in her heart, and descends on her soul in pitiable layers" (*LD*, p. 3). This comparison through the use of a simile (like a stone at the bottom of a lake) shows the extent to which the widow is abandoned and feels lonely.

Nasula no longer lives in Winelo Chiswebe's house whereas Yaremi still lives in Ajumobi's house where everything keeps reminding her of him. For instance, his hunting tools and other things such as his gun, armlets, and grinding stone, which are untouched since his death, frequently remind her of him. Yaremi's husband's physical absence is noticeable through the way their house looks like. For example, he used to take care of everything in the house; and with his death, many things are not as they used to be when he was alive. The most striking example is the presence of the rodents that he used to trap. It clearly appears in this quotation: "The presence of rats searching for kegs of salted sprats and rolls of condiments inside the wooden vats also reminded her of Ajumobi's conspicuous absence" (*LD*, p. 53).

Contrary to Nasula who does not feel any love for her late husband, Yaremi still loves her deceased husband. The most important thing for a couple is the carnal desire that they feel. Yaremi does not escape from this reality although her husband no longer lives physically. For instance, it happens that at night she needs her husband's lovely touch; but as he is not there, she figures him as mentioned in the quotation below:

There he was now – her husband – coming into her sloping room tarrying a bit by the doorway to fish her out with eager eyes. She imagined him in a taking lit room, his agitated shadow dancing hazily on the wall. He did not forget to bolt the door firmly behind. He felt his way deep inside, the room and quietly squeezed himself by the side of his wife; pleading with her to give him a chance. The night was cold! Yaremi, at first resisted. There was the time to bluff and to pretend; and a golden opportunity for her to let Ajumobi know that she also had a great power [...]. But later she surrendered - smiling a smile of acceptance to him - out of pity! And all went normally well between husband and wife in a matter of minutes! Yaremi ended her rapturous reminiscences with a frown in her face. (LD, p. 74)

Like Nasula, Yaremi's husband's psychological presence compensates for his physical absence. She cannot help feeling Ajumobi's psychological presence in her dreams and thoughts. For instance, when she is in the kitchen, she regularly feels Ajumobi's presence and even sees him briefly. Such ways are for widows like Yaremi a shield to struggle the sorrow, emptiness and injuries that their

husbands' death entails. As a matter of fact, Yaremi goes to Ajumobi's grave twice a day and sits down there, thinking of the best moments they have shared together. This is a token of Yaremi's sound attachment to her husband up to his death. In other words, their love was so strong that even after the husband's death, she behaves as if he were still alive. For that reason, she still resorts to lamentation in search for her deceased husband's support and help. Her behaviour proves that she has not killed her husband in any way whatsoever.

Nasula and Yaremi have motivated daily companions who give them smile and soothe their grief. This allows them to further manage their husbands' physical absence. Sula, Nasula's only daughter, is her jewel, her only cowrie of hope for whom she fights every day. She cannot support seeing Sula in difficulties as it can be seen in this passage: "The first time Nasula was told about how other children teased her daughter and how her daughter ignored them and held her head high, the story so touched her that when those who had relayed the story had gone and she was alone, she broke down and wept" (*ACH*, p. 74). It is crystal clear that Nasula is extremely sensitive to her daughter's well-being because she is her only companion who lessens her loneliness.

The interest and the motivation that Sula represents for her mother are the same thing for Woye and his grandmother, Yaremi. The little boy is Yaremi's daily companion, and he helps her in different chores. For example, Woye usually goes to collect money from his grandmother's debtors. Very often, when they are working, Yaremi sings or tells him stories to motivate him. It relieves Yaremi too, because there is someone with whom she can talk. Of course, just as Sula lessens Nasula's loneliness, Woye too reduces Yaremi's loneliness to some extent. The boy's real importance in Yaremi's life occurs when he falls sick insofar as she resolutely takes care of him. That importance once more appears when he is about to leave her for the city in order to go to school. Although Yaremi's grandson's departure sharply affects her, she cannot oppose it lest she should prevent the boy from having the opportunity to go to school. Woye has always been very positive in Yaremi's life. So, there is no wonder when she feels off-balanced and shaken by their sudden separation, as it can be seen through this quotation: "The little boy who had helped her tremendously to come to terms with her solitude – going, going [...]. The idea of Woye leaving caught her, off-balanced, and shook her beyond description. Its implications were very obvious to her" (*LD*, p. 133).

Without doubt, Sula and Woye would not have been so important to the two widows if their husbands were still alive. Since they feel abandoned, the two children are the only people on whom they can rely. The widows try to find with them what they have lost with their husbands' death. They try to make Sula and Woye occupy their late husbands' vacant place. Despite that fact, Yaremi cries a lot. This attitude seems to be normal since crying helps widows a lot to maintain their moral very high. Crying is a way for them to get rid of their sorrow, loneliness and regret. Contrary to Yaremi, the fact of crying regularly and regretting the husband's death is not noticeable with Nasula. Her determination and her sense of achievement prevent her from having such an attitude.

The fact that the widows always work is also an evident means to fight against the sorrow and grief that the loss of their husbands causes. When they work, they are physically and psychologically occupied. Thus, they focus their thoughts on what they are doing and consequently forget about anything else, albeit temporarily. So, they feel relaxed and free in their minds when they work because they do not have the occasion to think about their late husbands and their other daily problems. This is exemplified through the character of Yaremi: "Work to Yaremi had become

medicine against loneliness and frustration; a dose to fight fatigue and boredom with; a cushion for all pressures of daily life" (*LD*, p. 31). It means that the only hobby that she has found to overcome her predicament is work. Adebowale thus shows that work can be a subterfuge for widows to overcome their predicament.

The Question of the Widows' Remarriage and the Reasons for their Rejection of Remarriage

Forcing a widow to stay in her deceased husband's family by getting married to one of his brothers is a bad practice. Marriage is something very important based on love rather than on the 'levirate' system. It implies engagement, respect, submission and many other attitudes. So, forcing a woman to marry in the name of an awkward custom is like enslaving her. For example, the in-laws of the protagonist of *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula, want her to marry her brother-in-law, Isaki Chiswebe, shortly after her husband's death. The customs and traditions of the community which she belongs to require one of the deceased person's brothers to inherit the widow he has left behind so as to keep her within the family. This is known as the 'levirate' system. 'Levirate' is a custom according to which the widow(s) of a deceased husband become(s) the spouse(s) of his brother(s). The opposite which is called 'sororate' is a custom according to which a husband replaces his deceased spouse with her sister. Of course, both the 'levirate' and the 'sororate' systems are in vogue in most African communities.

Despite this age-long custom, Nasula has strongly opposed her in-laws' decision to make her remarry Isaki Chiswebe irrespective of the consequences of her refusal. The quotation below reveals this fact:

After the burial, the news was broken to her that Isaki Chiswebe would be taking over as her husband. She knew Isaki and his ways in things of the flesh very well. She also now knew the Chiswebe family too well to remain married to one of its members. She refused to be married to Isaki. (ACH, p. 8)

In the above quotation, Nasula has opted to break the custom of her people by refusing to remarry Isaki for two main reasons. The first reason has to do with Isaki's ways in 'things of the flesh' – women's sex – and the second one is related to fact that she does not want to keep on staying in the Chiswebe family which she considers as a bad family. Through Nasula's refusal to remarry her deceased husband's brother, Sinyangwe denounces the levirate system of widow inheritance which is a bad aspect of African traditions. So, Aguessy (2014, p. 76) is right when he writes: "In effect, her determination to stand ground to levirate confers on her the characteristics of a strong and revolutionary woman. She has broken the bondage to tradition and opens to emancipation though such a behavior has a price to pay for." Mutunda (2017 b, p. 55) corroborates the same idea in these terms:

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. [...]. 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?

As revealed in the foregoing quotation, Isaki is a womaniser – a man who has sexual affairs with numerous women. So, Sinyangwe make Nasula reject the idea of remarrying him on purpose to denounce the 'levirate' system. As soon as Nasula refuses to abide by that awkward custom, they

send her away from her late husband's house and deprive her of the inheritance that he has bequeathed to her and her daughter, Sula. The narrator displays the circumstances of her dispossession in the following excerpt:

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 her child before she found money for her travel and returned to the village. (ACH, pp. 9-10)

The above excerpt shows that the Chiswebe family has prevented the man in charge of reading the letter that Winelo has written before dying. It also unveils that they have torn the letter and taken away everything from her before sending her and her daughter out of the house. Aguessy (2014, p. 76) describes the situation as follows: "As a result [of her refusal], Nasula was dispossessed of all the properties that the late Winelo Chiswebe left her and her daughter by her in-laws. Anyway, Macola (2005, p. 8) approves Nasula's decision when he says: "Morality still exists in Sinyangwe's worldview, but it now the exclusive attribute of those *individuals* who, like Nasula, have managed to escape the overall collapse of formerly accepted norms of social conduct." She and Sula were chased from home like a fish failing [sic] on the sand[y] beach." Indeed, in most African communities, there is no independent woman. A woman belongs to her husband and, by extension, to his family. As a consequence, when the husband dies, she automatically becomes her in-laws' property. They dispose of her as they want and problems begin when she refuses. Sossou (2002, p. 201) is therefore right when she 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."

Although Mutunda (2017 b, p. 55) declares that "[...] in African cultures, particularly among some Zambian ethnic groupings, widow inheritance or levirate is a fairly common practice," in Nasula's case, her intuition has guided her so as to help her escape from death through AIDS. As a matter of fact, Isaki Chiswebe, whom she is supposed to remarry proves to be HIV positive and eventually dies of AIDS, followed by his three wives who also die later. The narrator of *A Cowrie of Hope* tells us about the situation in these terms: "Nobody had told her, but 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 fresh, the one that made you thin before taking you, the disease of today" (ACH, p. 27). The phrase 'the disease of today' used in the quotation refers to nothing else but 'AIDS'. Aguessy (2014, pp. 76-77) comments on Nasula's intuition and narrow escape from death as follows :

Furthermore, her intuitive denial to remarry Isaki Chiswebe has rightly saved her from a fatal destiny. For, Isaki has suffered of HIV and died from Aids [sic]. By preserving her dignity, she avoids death. Here, the round protagonist witnesses the disastrous moment of Isaki's existence and his three wives.

Nasula is therefore an intuitive woman who tries her best to preserve her dignity through her rejection of a marriage without love. A marriage which is not grounded on love is doomed to fail. In addition, her life has not come to an end probably because she has not fulfilled her destiny on earth

yet. Hence her intuition which leads her to escape from fatal death through HIV/AIDS. While making escape from death through that dreadful disease, Sinyangwe intend to show that widows can resist the 'leveirate' system and save their lives. She appears as a dignified woman who knows what is best for her. Mutunda (2017 b, p. 56) corroborates the idea as it appears in the quotation below:

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 [sic], it can be said that Nasula is portrayed as [a] strong and dignified woman who knows what is best for her.

The above quotation shows that Nasula has rejected her objectification by challenging her brother-in-law's misguided masculinity. In so doing, she asserts her own individuality and personal worth which are primordial in a woman's life. She thus opts to remain single like Yaremi rather than embarking on a new marriage. The two widows, Nasula and Yaremi, are single and nobody can blame them for rejecting a new marriage for many reasons. Normally, remarriage must be their goal in order to forget their late husbands and lead a new life. Besides, they are not economically comfortable because they hardly satisfy their needs. As such, their new husbands will probably take care of them if they get married anew. In addition, marriage is the most important thing for women's respect and consideration in society. The importance of marriage is evident through the message delivered by the other widows, namely Dedeye, Radeke and Fayoyin, when they advise Yaremi to engage in a new marriage: "No woman's life is ever complete without a man to prop her on in the arduous journey of this world" (*LD*, p. 111). Despite that piece of advice, Yaremi rejects all her three suitors during the cap-picking ceremony. Instead of choosing a new husband, she firmly stands her ground and opts to assume her widowhood. She abusively rejects Ayanwale, her first suitor, when he tries to induce her to marry him by saying:

*If ever I appear in your dream, Ayanwale, it would only be to haunt you like a fiend, and give you resistance and opposition [...]. You'll never want to close your eyes in sleep again for fear of dreaming dreadful dreams! I'll turn a real witch in your dream, Ayanwale, my eyes bloodshot. My nails, long and sharp, would be ready to snuff like out of you and hold your throat in a death grip. (*LD*, p. 101)*

The aforementioned quotation clearly shows the extent of Yaremi's resentment towards Ayanwale. Through the use of harsh words, she subtly implies that she has nothing to do with a drummer. The second suitor, Olonade, the wood carver undergoes the same fate. Yaremi clearly tells him what follows: "I don't want to become a twin mother. It is too late, Olonade. Too, too late. I have since retired and left the excitement of motherhood to my two daughters, Segi, and Wura. They can be mothers of twins and be mother of triplets. Not me, anymore" (*LD*, p. 102). Yaremi rejects the third suitor, Lanwa, the farmer, just as she has rejected her first two suitors. She addresses him in these terms as soon as he approaches her:

And, by the way, Lanwa, you must stop preaching the sermon of our people, old custom and tradition. This your long story of kinsman and cousin and half-brother connection with my late husband cannot catch me like a deer in a snare! I reserve the right to choose the type of life I want to lead. It could be that of a woman deliberately aloof in self-contentment, untouched by the victimization and oppression of the man or that woman

sulking the anger of an injury, protesting humiliations heaped on her over the years by the man. Not your business Lanwa, how I want to live my life! (LD, p. 103)

In the above-mentioned quotation, Adebowale advocates the importance of women's independence by breaking the chains of oppression through awkward customs and traditions through his mouthpiece, Yaremi. He uses her as a tool to denounce the bad practice in vogue in that community. Yaremi's resistance to the cap-picking custom as a lonely widow is therefore outstanding. She goes further and laments: "Nobody can use me like a house help, Lanwa, to peel tubers and slice banana chips on the wooden bench, front of a lonely farmstead in the bush!" (LD, p. 103). Yaremi's hard work and determination allow her to refuse to be cowed into accepting the traditional injunctions of widow inheritance and remarriage set by her society. However, the elders have spoken with one voice: "Yaremi needs purification at the shrine, to make her forget a lot of things. Purification later, for Yaremi. But choosing a new cap to replace the old one is now! Now!" (LD, pp. 107-108). The elders urge Yaremi to replace her dead husband with a new one by picking a new cap according to the demands of traditions. In the same vein, on the eve of the cap-picking ceremony three other widows, Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke approach her and urge her to remarry by saying:

No woman's life is ever complete without a man to prop her on in the arduous journey of this world. It is the law of nature. A bird does not fly with one arm of its wings. Let all of us, women of this land, learn to be humble, meek and submissive, and be ready, at all times to accommodate our men! When we lost our own husbands, Yaremi, we sank deep into despair. Thinking that was the end of the world. [...] a thick cloud gathered in our sky covering our earth in pithy darkness. (LD, p. 111)

In the above quotation, those women advise Yaremi and show her the necessity of choosing a new husband in order to make her life full of sense. Through their advice, they also intend to invite her to follow their footsteps by picking a new cap as they have already done. It is apparent in this quotation: "Pitiful days are over for us Yaremi. Blissful days are here with us. Now we are savouring the aroma of a new-found happiness" (LD, p. 112). Unfortunately, when the day of the cap-picking ceremony comes, Yaremi fails to abdicate and simply objects to her friends' advice. For her, there is no going back. When she nears the first cap, she says: "Give this bage cap to the baboon swinging on the branches of tall trees to wear" (LD, p. 116). As she moves away from the first cap, she says: "Not to Yaremi. Not to Yaremi" (LD, p. 116). She becomes more defiant when she gets to the second cap and says: "Let the chimpanzee in the wood have this Labankada. It would never fit Yaremi. And this third one, the gobi, is the cap of the gorilla posing like a clown in the foliage of jungle leaves" (LD, p. 116).

Adebowale portrays Yaremi as a strong and brave character. Her strength and bravery lie in the fact that she is a woman who knows her worth and would not allow the sentiments of others to prevent her from making the right decision for herself. She exhibits this striking act when the day comes for her to pick a new suitor as traditions demand. She blatantly refuses all advances, regardless of the consequences of her act. For fear of being ostracised, and most importantly to regain her peace, she has to leave Kufi village. Through this moving story, Adebowale has lent his voice to women at large, and to widows in particular, to denounce this awkward practice by using the character of Yaremi as a tool.

The two widows, namely Nasula and Yaremi, are not old as such and naturally need men's lovely look and sexual contact. In fact, Nasula is around thirty and Yaremi is in her forties. Hence the necessity for them to remarry to fill the gaps created by the premature departure of their husbands to the world of the ancestors. Unfortunately, they prefer remaining single because they are afraid of the probable bad outcome of their remarriage. Anyway, there are reasons for their rejection of remarriage.

Widowhood in African societies is generally based on practices which are humiliating oppressive, and even dehumanising for widows. Nasula relies on her strength and her hard work to live. She is completely different from city women who let men do immoral things with them. When her in-laws want to force her to get married to her late husband's younger brother, Isaki Chiswebe, she says that she prefers perishing in her poverty rather than accepting a forced marriage. She is even ready to lose the inheritance that her husband has left for her and her daughter, Sula. She does not regret this loss at any moment because she believes in herself to manage the situation. For her, marriage is not the single condition for a woman to be comfortable and happy. She tries her best to encourage her daughter to continue going to school. She advises her to avoid thinking about men and marriage in these terms: "I want you to grow up to stand on your own feet and not look to marriage or men for salvation. Marriage and men are not salvation but the ruin of any woman who cannot stand on her own feet" (*ACH*, p. 37). The quotation reveals that Nasula rejects a second marriage because she thinks that marriage is not salvation but ruin. She does not wish ruin and lack of salvation to her only daughter; that is why she urges her to continue her schooling.

Sinyangwe portrays Nasula as a young widow who fights for her only daughter's formal education. She acknowledges the necessity and the importance of formal education for her daughter, Sula. For her, education rhymes with independence and freedom because "What she had seen and heard and gone through along their path ways had 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 possibility of a good education giving to a woman independence and freedom" (*ACH*, p. 6). In that quotation, Nasula is evoking her sufferings with Chiswebe Winelo because of her lack of education. That is the reason why, as an illiterate woman, she is committed to sending her daughter to school. "She understood the importance of education and wanted her daughter to go far with her schooling. She understood the unfairness of the life of a woman and craved for emancipation, freedom and independence in the life of her daughter. Emancipation, freedom and independence from men" (*ACH*, p. 5). Aguessy (2014, pp. 77-78) highlights the reason for Nasula's position in the following quotation: "In fact, it is because she does not want Sula to undergo the same plight as herself that she is ready to scarify her own life for the education of her daughter." Complaining about the discrimination, abuses and violence against women because of the weight of culture and tradition, Sossou (2014, p. 207) writes:

Irrespective of the progress being made, the road to the total elimination of all forms of discrimination, abuses and violence against women under the guise of culture and tradition is going to be a long and a rough one. African women on the whole have to overcome problems of superstition, ignorance, illiteracy and physical suppression and be assisted through social education to become empowered collectively to be able to take full control of their lives and situations.

Sossou's plea for the total elimination of all forms of discrimination, abuses and violence against women under the guise of culture and tradition in the above-mentioned quotation is very telling. A

society free of such atrocities against women in general and widows in particular is desirable. Moreover, social education for their empowerment as she has suggested is a very good thing. However, apart from illiteracy, there are other reasons for Nasula's rejection of remarriage. Firstly, Isaki Chiswebe has already got three wives and she does not want to keep on staying in the Chiswebe family. Secondly, she is galvanised by the emancipated women from Kalingalinga who teach the women of the village things about freedom. They teach them the necessity for women to stand on their own feet so as to be respected. Without doubt, those reasons have led Nasula to rely on herself and struggle without getting married anew.

Concerning Yaremi, the only reason for her rejection of remarriage is sentimental. In fact, she opts to remain single simply because she still loves her late husband. When the cap-picking day comes, Yaremi thinks a lot about Ajumobi who is her first love. She therefore comes to the conclusion that no other man can occupy Ajumobi's vacant place in her heart because she still loves him. Her love for her late husband is immense and still influences her life. In addition, her first born child, Segi, supports her against a new marriage project. Indeed, Segi and her mother have put several questions to denigrate marriage as it can be seen in the quotation below:

Was a second marriage really necessary? Was it an attraction or a distraction? Was it really feasible? Was Mama ready now to adopt the new children of a new husband, and be prepared to play the role of a step mother? Would the step children be ready to accept Mama? Would Mama herself have the same preferences for the new step children as she had for her own biological children? Was Mama ready to put up with the weakness of a new man? How was Mama to get rid of the taunting memories of the past and settle down to a brand-new life? Was Mama in the proper frame of mind now to rearrange the circumstances of her life? How was she going to resist making comparisons between Ajumobi and her new man? Would the making of comparison augur well for the proposed marriage? Had Mama completed her beloved husband? Was Mama now ready to begin looking into a mirror several times each day to check her appearance? Was she prepared now to apply powder, antimony and perfume and put on a smiling face every minute now to impress a new man? (LD, p. 111)

Through the foregoing quotation, it is clear that Yaremi and her daughter have analysed the ins and outs of a second marriage to show that it is awkward for her to engage in it. They finally opt to reject it because they find no sound reason why she should indulge in it. The importance of the first-born child's viewpoint in the decisions concerning the family is therefore very important in the community depicted in *Lonely days*. Being particularly a woman, Segi is the adequate person with whom to discuss their mother's widowhood life. Whatever her position, it is due to influence her mother's final decision because the first-born child is like the spokesman of all the other children of the family. Segi stands on her mother's side against a second marriage and her collaboration is something very positive for her mother. Olugunle (2018, p. 136) corroborates the idea when he writes:

The collaboration of Segi with her mother to reject such cultural practice of forced marriage is the synergy in the contemporary feminist philosophy to rally against some social and cultural dictates that are uncouth and infringe on the fundamental human/woman rights. This translates into the shift in the discourse of feminism from liberal to radical.

Beyond the reasons displayed above, both widows, Nasula and Yaremi, have other aptitudes that prevent them from accepting a second marriage. As courageous and determined widows, they have challenged and transgressed the age-long awkward widowhood practices in their communities. They have succeeded in imposing themselves as women and as widows.

CONCLUSION

This article has dealt with three sections. The first section, which has dealt with "The Widows' Hardships through False Accusations", has examined the difficulties that the widows have encountered because their in-laws and the people in their respective communities have falsely accused them of being responsible of their husbands' death. The second one, which is "The Widows' Struggle for Survival", has revealed how the widows have struggled to survive. The third section, which is "The Question of the Widows' Remarriage and their Rejection of Remarriage", has dealt not only with the two widows' attitudes towards remarriage, but also with the reasons why they have rejected it. Both Sinyangwe and Adebowale have used similes and metaphor to convey their messages. However, Adebowale has made much use of flashbacks and proverbs to convey his message. The two novelists have succeeded in impacting their readership by evoking thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Although the two novels are mere fiction, the two writers leave us with no doubt that thousands of widows still suffer in African communities because of the weight of customs and traditions.

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