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TOWARD THE BIRTH OF A NEW SOCIETY IN BINWELL SINYANGWE'S A COWRIE OF HOPE

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Résumé

Cet article intitulé « Vers la naissance d'une société nouvelle dans *A Cowrie of Hope* de Binwell Sinyangwe » vise à mettre en exergue la naissance d'une société nouvelle comme la conséquence d'une indépendance infructueuse et de la société putréfiée subséquente. A cette fin, nous avons recours au Marxisme et au Féminisme. L'étude montre que trois événements clés prédisent la naissance d'une nouvelle société. Le premier événement est la crise économique qui provoque la ruine de la famille Chiswebe. Le second événement est relatif à la lutte féminine pour une société plus juste. Le troisième et dernier événement est relatif à la purge symbolique de la société, une conséquence de la lutte féminine. Ces trois événements constituent l'ossature de notre étude et peuvent être considérées comme les matériaux nécessaires à la fondation de cette société nouvelle ayant des piliers indestructibles.

Mot clés : éducation des filles, féminisme, lutte, naissance, indépendance.

Abstract

This article, 'toward the birth of a new society in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*' aims at emphasizing the birth of a new society as a byproduct of failed independence and subsequent rotten society. To this end, we resort to Marxism and Feminism. The study shows that three major events foretell the birth of a new society. The first event is the economic crisis that brings about the collapse of the Chiswebe family. The second one is the female struggle for a fairer society. The third and last event is the symbolic purge of the society, a consequence of female struggle. These three events make up the structure of our study and can be considered as the necessary materials for the foundation of this new society with unbreakable mainstays.

Keywords: birth, feminism, girls' education, independence, struggle

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INTRODUCTION

It would be a honey-coated lie to state that the great majority of Africans were not disillusioned with the aborted independences of African countries. Social disenchantment has triggered a tough anger

that in return has bred a hunger for changes. These changes are manifested in many post-independence novels and works of art bearing the hallmark of this bitter disillusion and calling for a new and idealized society. Artists and writers who deem it their

responsibility to be spokesmen of the people try hard to be the architects of upcoming societies. To this end, they design the advanced lay-out of these societies in their fictional world. Among writers whose works are pregnant with societal changes is Binwell Sinyangwe who flashes angry eyes at the deceitful post-independence society.

His novel, *A Cowrie of Hope*, snapshots the Zambian society and testifies to the hardships of the nineties in Africa. There is no need to be visionary to perceive that this Marxist-oriented novel is pregnant with turmoil and short-term changes. It is also helpful to point that these changes are triggered by the subtle but efficient class struggle underlying the novel's narrative. As a matter of fact, a hidden appeal for the disappearance of the current society and its numberless flaws is perceptible in the lines of the novel. The vanishing of the current society will undoubtedly bring about the birth of a new society with a more human face.

What is the core of these social changes? What are the events indicating the possible birth of a society different from the existing one? How will the upcoming society be born? Differently put, what are the circumstances that brew the birth of the new society?

Answers to these questions stem from the hardships of the nineties and the purge of the society from its impersonated pests. Wedged between these two conditions is the female struggle shouldered by Nasula. These three events make up the mainstays of the upcoming society.

The very existence of a class struggle in *A Cowrie of Hope* forces resort to Marxism, a theory advocating for the overthrow of the bourgeois society for another. We also resort to feminism because women are at the forefront of the struggle for a better society.

I. The Hardships of the Nineties

Binwell Sinyangwe largely ponders over the realities of the nineties in Zambia, his home country. Taking African realities as the backcloth of his novel, Sinyangwe depicts these hardships and points to the propagation of AIDS as a byproduct of the economic crisis that hit hard and crippled Africa. These hardships are also manifested in the downfall of the Chiswebe family.

1.1 The Economic Crisis and the Propagation of AIDS

There is no single African country that did not suffer profound turmoil that brought about change in the nineties. These changes which are a clarion call for a new society are materialized by AIDS and the economic crisis testifying to the author's iron will to dismantle the existing society.

Political and social upheavals that resulted into the shift of countries management under the tutelage of the Breton Wood institutions in the nineties are subtly dealt with by Sinyangwe. Nonetheless, he overtly mentions the economic whirlwind and subsequent structural adjustment plans and their corollaries of privatization and redundancies: "The new men in government are closing state companies east, west and south. The result: all men in the country have lost their jobs and become hopeless (Sinyangwe, 2000, 80). The author uses closing instead of privatizing state-owned companies. However, any African who eyewitnessed the nineties knows he is alluding to this bitter pill difficult to swallow and yet imposed to all developing countries at that period. The hopelessness displayed by workers who are made redundant is the miniature hopelessness of a whole society who has lost faith in their economic system and political leaders at the early beginnings of the nineties. A society wherein everybody has lost faith and hope is mournfully worthless and must consequently disappear.

The mournful situation is heightened by the unprecedented increase of poverty

resulting from the decrease of the population's purchasing power. Structural adjustments also lead to the feminization of poverty: "Women face an acceleration of poverty, declining support for their reproductive and caring roles, and diminished access to resources necessary for survival at a time when their needs are more acute" (Touwen, 2). Indeed, the prevailing paucity takes a woman's face and many women resort to marriage and prostitution as panaceas. Thus, bunches of girls turn into easy preys at the mercy of wealthy men and that unfortunately breeds the propagation of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) among which AIDS.

In his will to dismember society, Sinyangwe makes Isaki, the only representative of the Chiswebe who can maintain the economic empire and perpetuate patriarchy fall in the trenchant jaws of this pandemic. Patriarchy can be defined, in short, "as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles" (Tyson, 2006: 85). Sinyangwe combats these unmerited male privileges by contaminating them with AIDS. It is helpful to bear in mind that nowhere does the author write AIDS. Yet, he gives clues to identify it as the disease decimating the Chiswebe family and by extension the exploiting and heartless class.

Nobody had told her, but she knew. She could tell what it was, the disease that had afflicted Isaki and his three wives. It was the new, unmentionable disease of the world that came of the taste of flesh, the one that made thin before taking you, the disease of today (Sinyangwe 2000, p 27)

In the nineties, AIDS was cureless and anybody who was HIV positive could but respect a deathly rendezvous. By infecting the profiting class with AIDS that

decimates them, the author makes a clarion call for the end of the class whose members are "selfish beings who loved money more than people" (Sinyangwe 2000, p 12). Isaki is not dashing handsome. His physical appearance tallies with the family's unquestionable inhumanity and wickedness that make Sinyangwe qualify them as rough and glib-tongued (Sinyangwe 2000, p 12).

As can be seen, the tenors of this Zambian society do not represent and defend the interests of the population. They value material things over human beings and cultivate high materialism. The perpetuation of such a class is a danger to their society. And the author is so farsighted that he hastens its downfall.

1.2 The Downfall of the Chiswebe Dynasty

The economic storm that hit Africa in the 1990s stroke hard some economic empires that could but collapse. Such is the case of the Chiswebe family who was taken in the whirlwind of downfall which can be observed at three levels. The author summons Nasula's insubordination, the change of government and drought as factors contributing to the fall of the Chiswebe dynasty.

In the aftermath of her husband Winelo's death, Nasula was due to be inherited by Isaki according to tradition. As elucidated in the part dealing with Nasula's defiance of social conventions, the process sets her and the Chiswebe family at loggerheads. This results into Nasula's defeat and as a consequence, she is turned into a homeless woman obliged to live in the margins of society. Yet, the one who enjoys true victory is Nasula who has shaken the foundations of a system till now unquestioned. As a result, the Chiswebe's pride and reputation are seriously skinned because they have lost a struggle against a poor, a defenseless and orphaned woman. What is more, as the guardians of patriarchy, this loss equates

with castration and the end of a system that has served as a cover to their depraved behavior. Pointless to say that their being weakened foretells the end of a society that has thrived through the sweat of the proletariat. No wonder the author manages so as the only offspring who could perpetuate patriarchy is a not a boy but rather a girl, that is Nasula. Nurtured with her mother's ideals, she will surely be at the firing squad of the struggle against patriarchy and the undeserved male privileges. One thus observes a shift from portraying women as objects to that of subjects responsible for their destiny. Turning women into subjects is a way of beheading patriarchy.

The change of government has pushed closer to the grave the Chiswebe family whose agony starts with Nasula's subversion. The family is hit hard by the economic crisis because the change of government puts a standstill to their decayed practices. Actually, this family even though heavily indebted, was living like true wealthy people without worrying about paying back the money they borrowed from the State. Furthermore, they always take inputs on credit and never pay back what they owe to the government. The unexpected change of government puts an end to these unmerited favors. Indeed, they lose all their connections at the summit of the state and consequently they are obliged to pay back their numerous debts. Failure to pay results into seizure of their properties as evidenced below.

Was it not in the past that people got free things from the government and went about looking like rich people over things for which they had not dropped a single bead of sweat? Do you think things are the same with these new people in government? The fertiliser people they failed to pay, came

and took away every wealth that Mangano farm was made of, from what to sleep on to the last animal (Sinyangwe, 2000, 36).

What Sinyangwe is depicting here is a blurred description of the general situation of the country which was heavily indebted following unnecessary borrowings. According to Touwen, heavy indebtedness brought about the bankruptcy of the country.

The heavy debt burden of US\$7 billion which resulted from the excessive borrowing from the World Bank, Paris-Club and Non-Paris Club bilateral donors, and private banking institutions in order to finance the budget deficit over the last two decades, brought Zambia to bankruptcy in 1991(Touwen, 1).

The bankruptcy situation has put the country under the tutelage of loaners represented in the novel by fertilizer people enforcing new laws to show the shift in the country management. These fertilizer people represent the Breton Wood institutions' agents who pitilessly behave in third-world countries.

To add to the Chiswebe's woes, a terrible drought visited the country and spread famine everywhere. As a consequence, the family can no longer feed properly and their livestock is reduced to mere bones:

Dogs were bones, the chickens so few they seemed not to exist, and there was not a single goat, pig, duck or guinea fowl in sight. No cattle, no sheep, no pigeons. Yet in the past these had formed part of an overflowing life of prosperity that greeted your eyes, nose and ears the moment you entered the farm. The kraal had collapsed, rotten and overgrown with grass

and small trees (Sinyangwe 2000, 21).

What the author is emphasizing is the total collapse of a once rich family whose “homestead was as quiet and lifeless as a graveyard at night” (Sinyangwe, 2000, 22). Famine can be construed as a metaphor of the austerity the country is faced with, with cutting of useless expenses.

True enough, Nasula’s subversion, the economic crisis and drought bring about the downfall of the Chiswebe family. Yet, this downfall is materialized by the tribulations of Father Chiswebe who has fallen from his pedestal. This downward movement confers him the features of a mere destitute person: “Chiswebe had become a man who washed without soap. His once shiny, soap-smooth skin was coarsened and dull. His appearance had changed greatly and he had aged” (Sinyangwe, 2000, 36). Washing without soap and dressing without perfume is a true descent into hell for someone who has lived paradise life for years.

The Chiswebe family is one of the dinosaurs of patriarchy. Like dinosaurs, this family is called to disappear. Nasula’s subversion echoes this premeditated disappearance sounding the death knell of patriarchy for a fair society as follows: “Your grandfather now looks like a tramp bitten by a snake and waiting to die” (Sinyangwe, 2000, 36).

II Female Struggle for a Fair Society

It is commonplace to deny girls and women the slightest right. Awful conventions often shoehorn them into subservient roles in patriarchal societies. In Sinyangwe’s fictional world, females reject such practices and involve themselves in struggles for an equitable society. These struggles are seeable by Nasula’s defiance of social convention and the schooling of girls.

2.1 Nasula’s Defiance of Social Conventions

The Zambian society depicted by Binwell Sinyangwe is highly and harmfully patriarchy-oriented. It is structured in such a way that women are the private property of men through the institution of marriage. To show that women are mere properties and tradable goods that can be bartered or swapped at any time, they are inherited after the death of their spouses. Nasula, Sinyangwe’s brainchild, defies this women-unfriendly convention by refusing to be inherited by her brother-in-law when her husband is gunned down for theft.

Nasula is still mourning her departed husband when she is informed that she will be inherited by Isaki, her brother in-law. Such information clearly suggests that she is on the list of commodities to be inherited. The family, under the veil of patriarchy, has launched her commodification process. In Marxist parlance, “Commodification is the treatment of objects and people as commodities, as things whose only importance lies in their benefit to ourselves” (Tyson, 2006:71). This means that things get importance according to their exchange value or utility.

Nasula rejects such an indecent proposal that does not even respect her widowhood. Her refusal to be an inherited spouse must be construed as the *cri de Coeur* of thousands of women reduced to silence by patriarchy. Refusing Isaki is a right hook to male chauvinism. Nasula is consequently the spokeswoman of these so many frustrated and enslaved women who are striving to get free from the trenchant jaws of patriarchy. Through her stern no to her in-laws, she questions social conventions that value men over women. By the same token, she claims her say in matters related to women’s well-being and interests. Nasula knew in advance the toll of her defiance of established things. She will forever remain destitute as exemplified in the following: ‘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).

Even though she knows that she will perish with her destituteness, Nasula is determined to end up with these venomous practices. This triggers her in-laws anger because by refusing their proposal, she becomes a useless good devoid of the least exchange value. Commenting on her insubordinate attitude, Faith (2006, p.63) writes: "Her refusal is a revolt to a cultural practise that is [] a tool that can be unscrupulously manipulated to oppress and subjugate women".

As can be seen, social conventions are manipulated to keep women in the fetters of subjugation. To douse Nasula's rebellious nature and prevent such future deviances, the Chiswebe family behaves punitively by disinheriting her and her cherished daughter. "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).The preceding lines testify that nobody can defy the Chiswebe and by extension patriarchy without carrying the can. Indeed, Nasula's 'refusal in marrying her late husband's brother leads to her and her daughter being ostracised from her home and supposed family' (Faith 2020, 63). In addition to being outcast, Nasula is accused of being responsible for her husband's death despite evidence that he has been gunned down by the police. Such practices are widespread in Africa where scapegoats and unnatural reasons are always found to justify a death. This is exemplified in the following:

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 (Faith 2020, 63)

From the above, it can be averred that the in-laws are only concerned with the heritage of their deceased parent, not the well-being of his widow and offspring. Mutunda brings to the fore some of the reasons advocated for such practices:

Widow practice is legitimized through some religious beliefs that the spirit of the late husband would only rest peacefully, if the surviving spouse remarry within the deceased family, otherwise it would constantly cause disaster to the uncooperative spouse (Mutunda, 2017, 55).

As proven above, getting inherited after one's husband death is backed by social and religious reasons. Nasula whose mind is not caged by misfortune and poverty rejects such anachronistic practices that have nothing to do with love. In her mind, marriage is a matter of free love. Mutunda develops this idea as follows:

By challenging Isaki Chiswebe's misguided performance of masculinity that seeks to objectify a woman, Nasula asserts her own individuality and personal worth. She also wants to remind Isaki Chiswebe that marriage means an act of faith and love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen. In this regards, it can be said that Nasula is portrayed as strong and

dignified woman who knows what is best for her. The protagonist takes an African feminist approach that, according to Gatwiri and McLaren (2016), “attempts to educate, empower and elevate women to a position where they can own their power, not against men but alongside them” (2016, p. 267). She challenges patriarchy without emasculating the Chiswebe or rather the masculine world (Mutunda 2017, 56).

What Mutunda is emphasizing is that refusing to get married to her brother in law is a way of defying patriarchy that has set a series of unfair rules to encapsulate women’s freedom and even deny them the least they need to live and experiment happiness. Nasula is a rebellious and revolutionary woman who is visionary enough to perceive that behind her in-laws’ demand lurks the perpetuation of harmful conventions that give to men the green light to oppress and ill-treat women. Her rebellion is therefore a way of venting female plight and freeing herself from male supremacy. The Chiswebe’s loss over Nasula is a miniature loosening of their stranglehold over all the women fettered by patriarchy and is evidence that no future is doomed.

Nasula’s subversive behavior recalls that of Warĩnga who operates as an activist. This name means ‘woman in chains’ in Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*. Pondering over the meaning of Warĩnga, Ndigirigi writes:

In *Devil on the Cross*, where a character belongs in the class structure, what s/he will do and how s/he views the world is already suggested by the name s/he is given so that in the course of the action, the character only reveals various aspects of his/her already suggested nature. The character names, therefore, become a deliberate

translation of concepts into illustrative terms. They are a symbolic means of concretizing social forces, even telling us something of the writer’s attitude towards a particular character and the class s/he represents (C. Ndigirigi : 1991, p. 97).

What Ndigirigi is advocating is a sort of fatality linked to names. ‘The name Warĩnga suggests that she is enchained and will consequently suffer all her life-time. However, Warĩnga is so dauntless that she goes beyond the mere revelation of aspects of her name and refuses to be guided or oriented against her will. As a consequence, instead of being victim of fate, she defeats fate’ (Kouakou 2016, 167). In *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula means mother of let’s things be, which implies that she must accept things the way they happen, even if the hell is forced on her. Like Warĩnga, she defeats the fate bestowed on her daughter by society. And she overcomes this fate thanks to school.

2.2. Girls’ Schooling and the Prospect of Female Economic Independence

In many African societies, modern education is viewed as a stepping stone for membership of middle or high class society, which entails a high purchasing power. Membership of high class is paired with economic independence. Yet, Africa lags behind Western countries regarding girls’ schooling. In the ideal upcoming society, Sinyangwe endeavors to guarantee this independence to women through schooling.

The uppermost importance of education is revealed in a dialogue between Nasula and Sula when in the wake of failure to gather the necessary money for her schooling, Sula tells her mother to give up the struggle for her education:

You must go to school. You don’t know what suffering I have gone through because apart

from being poor and a woman, my parents did not send me to school. I don't want you to suffer the way I have suffered. I want you to grow up to stand on your own feet and not look to marriage or men for salvation. I want you to go far with your education so that you can support yourself, earn a good living and be free and independent in your life. You must go to school (Sinyangwe, 2000, 37).

To get the necessary money for her offspring's education, Nasula resorts to fertilizer people so as to cultivate beans. Advocating her destituteness, she is refused the least fertilizer whereas huge quantities are granted to the Chiswebe on credit. Such a discrimination is grounded in patriarchy that maintains women in absolute poverty. Indeed, granting females the necessary fertilizer is harbinger of male woes given that they could free themselves from men's hooks after toiling the land. Had Nasula been a man, she would have been given the fertilizer like the Chiswebe. Nasula's determination to guarantee modern education to Sula echoes that of Warĩnga in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* where one can read:

Her dream of dreams was to finish school successfully and win a place at the university. Her ambition was to study electrical, mechanical or civil engineering. The word 'engineer' was what made her heart beat whenever she shut her eyes and tried to look into the tomorrow of her life (Ngugi, pp. 140-1).

Warĩnga and Nasula have identified school as the only trustworthy solution to women's economic independence and way out of the claws of patriarchy. Though from different novel, their moving stories are

interlaced and it is as if communicating by telepathy, they come to the conclusion that absence of education is synonymous with forever wobbling on the edge of destituteness. Destitute people are found at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Tyson opines that "members of the underclass and the lower class are economically oppressed: they suffer the ills of economic privation, are hardest hit by economic recessions, and have limited means of improving their lot" (Tyson, 2006:55). Accordingly, they are at the forefront of any struggle aimed at bettering society. The struggle for economic survival and prosperity is shouldered by Nasula through her ever ending untamable will to insure the schooling of her cherished Sula. Though she is illiterate she has a sparkling intelligence that permits her to realize that only education is the solution to their plight. The idea that school is the way-out of poverty has been instilled in Nasula by female activists who campaign for women's freedom through a good education:

She had not forgotten and she would not forget. The faces and voices of those young women of good education and good jobs in offices who came to Kalingalinga shanty compound, where she lived with Winelo, to talk to the women of the compound about the freedom of the woman. What they said about the importance of knowing how to read and write and having a good education, what they said about the rights of a woman, and the need for a woman to stand on her own (Sinyangwe 2000: 8)

What is being encouraged here is the necessity for women to rely on themselves instead of resorting to men for their freedom. The campaign impacts Nasula to a point that she proceeds to a kind of reversal of history. Indeed, the story is organized in such a way that readers notice the fruit of girls'

schooling even before Sula starts school. This idea is evidenced by Nasula whose admiration for these self-governing young women makes her imagine a bright future for her daughter. Sula's future is not different from the one displayed by these ladies who have overcome all the obstacles to embody freedom:

How they unmasked a man and reduced the devil to dust. How they cried for awareness and hailed the strength and power of a woman. Those young women. Sweet, sparkling creatures of the gods. They were freedom itself. Light and hope. In them she saw Sula her daughter and in Sula she saw them (Sinyangwe, 2000; 8).

The last sentence of this passage clearly transforms Sula into a mythical character who has taken the faces and intelligence of many women who sparkle the intelligence of girls for a genderless society. Interestingly, modern education has conferred on these young women the rights that social conventions deny them. They have been raised to the top of the social hierarchy despite the paucity of opportunities girls face. As the voices of the voiceless, they voice out the plight of women reduced to toys in the hands of heartless men. By considering them as impersonated freedom and hope, Sinyangwe portrays female education as the only trustful way-out of their predicament. Illiteracy is an electronic fence impending any movement towards female independence whereas education is the light illuminating their path to emancipation. This imaginary fence is like the Berlin Wall that has for a time separated East Berlin from West Berlin. The German wall has been demolished in 1989, consecrating the reunification of Germany. Sinyangwe destroys the fictive wall built by patriarchy through female emancipation following education. For Gerder Lerner, Ngomi "women's emancipation is freedom from

oppressive restrictions imposed by sex; self-determination and autonomy". In the same seam, "Freedom from oppressive restrictions means freedom from natural, biological restrictions due to sex as well as from societally imposed ones" (as quoted by Ngomi, 2020: 149). In a few words, emancipation equals liberation from all sorts of thralldom.

If Nasula so hustles and bustles for Sula's schooling, it is because she is convinced that only education can put an end to the chain of frustration, injustice, unfairness, indignities and other dehumanizing practices lorded upon women by men. In a word, Nasula could carve out an enviable life for Sula thanks to school. Differently put, an educated girl is poised to assume position in society given that school can prompt women's capacity building or empowerment and make them leave the bottom of society to the top. Paraphrasing Aguessy, one can say that "Sinyangwe is insinuating that a woman represents the corner stone in the process of transformation of human being and his or her environment" (Aguessy, 2014, 74). In other words, women are true agents of social revolution.

Throughout Africa, women have come to international prominence thanks to successful schooling like Sinyangwe's women. Such women are Hellen Jonhson, former Liberian president and Gwendolyn Konie, who ran for president in 2001. Although she lost overwhelmingly, she set an important symbolic precedent, and others, including the outspoken Edith Nawakwi of the Forum for Development and Democracy (FDD) party, have indicated that they intend to run in the future (Taylor Scott 2006, 93)

The widespread idea that "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation" is perfectly illustrated through the author's plea for girls' education. For Sinyangwe, girls and women should not be sidelined because they actually represent the future of humanity. Accordingly they deserve education that will empower them in

their mission of caretakers in a purified society.

III. The Symbolic Purge of Society

In patriarchal societies, codes are purposely set to impinge female emancipation. From cultural conventions down to male chauvinism, one can easily observe overt or covert conventions intended to maintain women under the control of men. Even when it is not the case, there are male figures who are strong obstacles whose removal could lead straightly to the birth of a society wherein female characters can enjoy life on the same basis as men. The removal of these obstacles is materialized by the imprisonment of Gode and the suspension of his accomplice John, a rotten policeman.

3.1 The Imprisonment of Gode

In his willpower to contribute to the advent of a new society, Sinyangwe fuels the female struggle shouldered by Nasula toward the end of the novel by some male characters who operate as the helping hand needed to build a genderless society. The fruits of this struggle are first seeable in the form of the imprisonment of the famous white-collar thief Gode who was till his encounter with Nasula, above the law.

Gode Silavwe is sadly famous for his hooliganism. He is a “predatory bird” who preys on weaker persons under the cover of his aura. Many a time, he has stolen the goods of sellers without being worried by the police where he has strong ties that always favor him whence he is sent there by his victims. The author identifies him as one of the male figures responsible for the predicament of women in independent Zambia. We consequently go along with Faith who opines that

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 (Faith 2020, 65).

From the above, it can be inferred that powerful men like Gode are deified by society and are above the law. That is one of the reasons why he is never arrested when he swindles traders. Even when he disappears with Nasula’s beans, she is advised to go back to her village to avoid more troubles. Nasula who has rebelled against the Chiswebe family cannot accept such a proposal which is synonym with being knocked down by fate. The epic battle she engages with Gode at the risk of her death testifies to her determination to break all the chains that fetter women. An unexpected helping hand comes from a policeman who drives them to the police station. There, since Gode is above the law, he is released. Even without listening to Nasula’s version of events, John, the policeman in charge of the case, frees Gode.

Such a behavior may stem from the fact that in a patriarchal society, women are looked down and can never be given reason at the detriment of men, above all when they are wealthy people. Infuriated by such a flagrant injustice, Nasula unexpectedly finds a bulwark against despair in the person of Samson Luhila. Indeed, she manages to meet and report everything to Samson, the boss of the police station. The latter summons the rotten policeman and orders him to bring back Gode. As goes the saying, ‘all days for the thief, one day for the owner’. In the case understudy, the untamable Nasula is the terminus of Gode. As a matter of fact, the powerful and unsuspecting Gode who has till now succeeded in avoiding prison thanks to his strong ties at the police station is obliged

to confess that he has effectively stolen Nasula's bag of beans. By recognizing his forfeiture under the pressure of Samson Luhila, Gode opens the gate of prison for himself. And Samson renders justice to Nasula by making Gode pay Nasula's beans with an extra sum of money.

The most noticeable consequence of this justice rendered to Nasula is that with the money obtained, she pays brand new articles comprising a school bag, clothes, shoes, a mattress...for Sula. She buys for herself a flowered dress of many colours (p. 147). Buying these new goods equates with a clear-cut rejection of the old society symbolized by rags and second-hand clothes characterizing Nasula and Sula and by extension the proletariat. The rejection of second-hand clothes must be construed as the author's way of refusing Western obsolete ideologies for new ones necessary for the construction of the upcoming society. As for the flowered dress of many colors, it represents a kind of rainbow nation that should be built with the contribution of all the Zambian people.

In this future and rainbow society, thieves and highway criminals will not be protected by the police. They will be sent to prison like Gode that the chief of the police sends to prison as evidenced in the following:

Take this man to the Criminal Investigation Department. Leave him there for the constable who arrested him to come and handle the paperwork. Tell whoever is there that my instructions are that after this has been done and the docket opened, he must be locked up. (Sinyangwe 2000; 142-143)

Gode's arrest can be understood as a symbolic effort to empower or contribute to women's capacity building in the frame of their emancipation. Samson represents a sort of god-sent authority who applies divine

justice where human justice has proved dysfunctional because of selfishness, corruption, and gender bias and above all patriarchal conventions targeting women.

Samson is a biblical figure who stands for justice. Faith avers that Sinyangwe gives him this name to appeal to everybody who is in a position of power to use this power for the emancipation of women. He writes:

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 (Faith, 2020: 66).

What Faith is advocating is that the capacity building of women or their emancipation should not be shouldered by women only. It should be a societal struggle for a fair society.

The imprisonment of Gode sounds the death knell of all the white collar hooligans who thrive from the sweat of the lumpenproletariat. By the same token, it consecrates the loosening of the strong jaws of patriarchy that bites women without the slightest pity or remorse. The suspension of John, Gode's accomplice at the police station also testifies to Sinyangwe's eagerness to free women from men's grips.

3.2 The Suspension of John, the Rotten Policeman

Public administration is highly infested in the Zambian society that serves

as backdrop to *A Cowrie of Hope*. The police station where Nasula is driven to with Gode to clear up their conflict, though teeming with wasteful agents, is taken as a microcosm of Zambia to denounce and curb corruption.

Curbing corruption in Zambia is seen in the frame of a gender-based opposition. As a matter of fact, resort to corruption to impede female well-being in patriarchal societies functions as an efficient strategy. In the case under study, Gode has always bribed policemen whenever he has been conducted to the police station by women whose goods he has stolen. Policemen behave so because they have been breastfed by patriarchal prejudices that see women as rightless and downtrodden people that they can rightfully abuse.

Commenting on women plight in *A Cowrie of Hope* and *The Purple Violet*, Faith Ben-Daniels points:

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 (Faith 2020: 65).

Faith does not mention John the rotten policeman whose behavior testifies to the absence of the smallest wellspring of integrity in Zambia. And yet, he is an outstanding opposing male figure whose attitude is chocking because contrary to the Chiswebe family and Gode, John is paid and dressed by the government to protect citizens, without any gender-based bias. As such, he should be a sort of herald whose acts

should win him the title of hero. Unfortunately, he eats in the garbage of society. In addition to being deeply rooted in corruption and patriarchal practices, he displays an unprecedented male chauvinism toward Nasula and frees Gode. As a response to that 'living symbol of a shameful disease' (Sinyangwe, 2000:138), Nasula reports to the top-boss of the police who summons John on the spot and sermonizes him as follows: "Inspector, tell me for once," he said, 'just when are we going to finish with Gode Silavwe and the problem of innocent people who bring beans for sale at Kamwala market. Where are we going with senior officers like you?" (Sinyangwe, 2000:138).

The anger displayed by Samson is the evidence that John is not at his first breach of duty. He is the secular arm of Gode that he always protects. In return, Gode rewards him with banknotes. To end up with John's vested interests and practices that cast opprobrium on the police, Samson orders John to bring Gode back: "Samson Luhila told him that he was tired of his ways and that he was not going to force him to explain any further or bother to listen to him. [] Things won't end so easily for you this time. I want Gode Silavwe here and now." (Sinyangwe, 2000:138).

The foregoing lines show that Samson, who is still a wellspring of truthfulness, is fed up with John who has swapped his trellis for dirty money. A definite solution to such a misbehavior must accordingly be found. And the one Samson has found is to suspend John on the spot: "I have suspended you, while the charges against you are investigated, and you are on suspension starting from now" (Sinyangwe, 2000:143).

Through the suspension of John, Samson Luhila cleanses off the police as a public institution and flings open the gateway for a society wherein justice will be rendered not on the basis of people's social backgrounds or gender but rather on the basis of facts. Differently put, by uprooting

the decayed tooth that can paralyze the whole mouth, the author advocates for a society wherein poor and weak people will not be nonsuited at the benefice of well-to-do ones. John's suspension is consequently a sort of trump of doom whereby divine justice is rendered to everybody according to their acts or behaviors.

CONCLUSION

The hardships of the nineties seem to indicate a purge of the society by God himself. Social grievances and upheavals that require the instauration of democracy in Africa in the nineties do not constitute the backcloth of Sinyangwe's novel. Yet, the iron will to dismantle the existing society is expressed with a strong determination. All the woes bestowed on the Chiswebe family, the advocate of patriarchy and dehumanization testify to the author's willpower to contribute to the birth of a fair society wherein gone are misappropriation, impunity, economic hooliganism, female exploitation and many somber practices that impinge development. The downward movement of the Chiswebes coupled with the upward movement of women through education foretell the birth of a homogenous society.

As a male feminist, Binwell Sinyangwe brings women at the firing squad of the struggle for a fair society. Through the untamable Nasula, Sinyangwe rolls back the wheels of history and gives it a new impetus that prompts new relationships and societal practices. He has created this rebellious character to clearly indicate ways of liberation for the African woman fallen in the pitfalls of destituteness and patriarchal oppression. By first defying nauseous patriarchal conventions and later on overcoming the fate bestowed on her daughter, Nasula turns the future into a virgin page that everybody must fill according to his/her aspirations. The willpower to fill in this page is so strong that

it destroys what handers collective and individual happiness. The purge of the society materialized by the imprisonment of Gode and the suspension of the rotten policeman are testimonies of Sinyangwe's appeal for the birth of a new society that will no longer sideline and exploit women. The author's willingness to give birth to this new society is clearly perceived in Nasula's daydream: "A weight dropped on to her body. A germination and a growing in her womb, then a violent pain. The pain, red and hot, tore into her. She dissolved into nothingness and there was a birth" (Sinyangwe, 2000 p. 99).

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