



Widows' Hardships as a Catharsis for their Self-Assertion: A Marxist Reading of Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to discuss the inhuman treatment of widows in African society and purports to show how these abuses (violence) have in the process enabled them to self-determine. This predicament has not escaped the creative impulse of Bayo Adebowale, who, in his novel *Lonely Days*, delineates with dexterity, how widows are abused and marginalized in most African societies after the demise of their male partner/counterpart. The analysis is based on the Marxist approach to literature which focuses on social class struggle. The primary material used for arguments in this study is *Lonely Days* where data were collected. The result of the analysis shows that women's marginalization is threefold; first by their sex, second by their status of married women and third by their new status as widows. Consequently, they suffer from various hardships in the hands of their greedy in-laws and are even accused of murdering their own husband. The study also shows that this predicament has, nonetheless, served as prime mover to their realization and emancipation. It concludes that awakening, abnegation, determination and work commitment are significant weapons that overcome the difficulties they face in the patriarchal society they are born and raised.

Keywords: inhuman treatment, marginalization, self-definition, patriarchal dogmas, widowhood

LES SOUFFRANCES DES VEUVES COMME UN CATHARSIS POUR LEUR AFFIRMATION DE SOI : UNE LECTURE MARXISTE DE *LONELY DAYS* DE BAYO ADEBOWALE

Résumé : S'appuyant sur la théorie marxiste, le présent article vise à mettre en lumière les traitements inhumains auxquels sont soumises les veuves dans la société africaine et montre comment ces maltraitances (violences) ont permis à ces dernières de s'autodéterminer. L'étude montre que les veuves subissent des mauvais traitements et sont marginalisées dans la plupart des sociétés africaines. Il ressort de l'analyse que le mariage constitue un fardeau pour les femmes africaines à cause de leur triple marginalisation. La première est sexiste. La deuxième marginalisation est relative à leur vie conjugale et la troisième est liée à leur statut de veuves. En tant que veuves, les femmes subissent de diverses épreuves de la part des proches de leur défunt mari. Accusées d'être responsables de la mort du mari, les veuves sont exclues de la gestion des biens du défunt. En outre, les maltraitances que subie la plupart des veuves, deviennent le moteur de leur réalisation et émancipation. Enfin, l'éveil, la détermination et l'engagement sont des armes pour surmonter les difficultés auxquelles elles sont confrontées dans la société.

Mots clés: définition de soi, dogme patriarcal, marginalisation, traitement inhumain, veuvage

Introduction

The plights of widows and their quest for survival have been the concerns of many literary works. Widowhood is very often considered as one of the scourges that prevents women from thriving socially. The harm of this plague did not leave African critics aloof. They have through their literary creations discussed this burning issue and have made useful suggestions as to widow's self-assertion, self-definition and self-actualization. Critics like Olugunle Wole, Sidi Chabi Moussa and Nouréni Boukari in their critical works have pondered the meaning of this predicament as featured by Bayo Adebowale in his insightful novel, *Lonely Days*. In fact, this novel is about the plights and the inhuman treatments of widows in Nigerian society and how these inhuman treatments fortunately constitute the driving forces for their self-definition and self-actualization. In Bayo's fictional Nigerian society, the women's marginalization is threefold; firstly by their sex, secondly by their status of married women, and lastly by their new status as widows. Conscious of the extent to which this phenomenon increases in African societies and the harm it does to women, I think it is important to suggest ways and means to help eradicate this issue in African society. For an onset, this work is entitled "Widows' Hardships as a Catharsis for their Self-Assertion. A Marxist Reading of Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*". This paper purports to show and analyze the novel in the light of Marxist literary criticism that the society depicted is tainted with gender hierarchies and full of patriarchal traps and the ensuing challenges widows have to face on their way to self-invention, self-accomplishment and psychological equilibrium in patriarchal traditional communities. It also seeks to show that the maltreatments suffered by these widows become the driving force for their realization and emancipation. Marxist literary criticism is used to scrutinize this study. Marxist literary criticism seeks to fight against forms of social injustices in societies and human exploitation. Marxist critics aim at looking at the functions of literature in society and demand social change and amelioration. Marxists fight for the building of a well-balanced society whereby social wealth is fairly shared. This theory will be of great importance in the analysis of Bayo's *Lonely Days*. To come to this end, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses about the Psychological Wounds on Women in Bayo's *Lonely Days*. The second section deals with the issue related to marriage as social burden and the last one is about aesthetics of survival and self-determination in Bayo's *Lonely Days* (subsequently referred to as *LD* followed by the page number).

1- Psychological Wounds on Women in Bayo's *Lonely Days*

In most African societies, widows are a category of people associated with pains, grief, humiliation and depression. African societies deprive women in general and widows in particular of their inalienable rights. This issue has been the main focus of the Nigerian male writer Bayo Adebowale, who depicted in his novel, how Widows suffer from emotional, psychological and physical abuse, depression and loneliness in the name of cultural and religious practices and norms inherent in Kufi village, the referent setting presented to the reader as the microcosm of the macrocosm. Widows in this fictional society are discriminated, humiliated and are isolated from the society. Bayo's widows are these women subjected to inhuman treatments perpetuated by their society which is dominated by the patriarchal dogmas. Florence Orabueze, for instance, notes that:

Widowhood is a word that everywoman dreads to mention. In Africa, it brings to a peak all the humiliation, subordination, degradation and oppression which an African woman goes through in her life time. From the time of her husband's death to the time of her own death, his family and society blame her for the passing away of the much needed male. She is indirectly asked why she should survive the man
(F. Orabueze, 2004, p.140)

From this excerpt, it is clear that widows in African societies suffer a lot due to the traditional laws governing African societies. In Bayo's fictional society, Yaremi and her three other widows undergo untold sufferings from their society. These widows' rights have been violated by their patriarchal society which privileges only the men. As a matter of fact, they have lost their social status, sense of belonging and identity as well. These four widows according to A. Skyere (2014, p.410) are "made to go through physical and mental torture. Some of them are denied food, limits put on their freedom of speech, movement and association. The unbearable and infringes on human rights." This shows the extent to which Nigerian society in general and that of Kufi in particular constitute hindrances to women's development. These widows such as Yaremi, Dedewe, fayoyin and Radeke are made to suffer under the strains of cultural and religious practices, beliefs and norms. This deplorable situation has been discussed by many novelists who delineate the difficulty they undergo in their social intercourse because they are stigmatized in the process. As a result, their status of single parents with limited financial and economic resources prevent them from giving decent education to their progenies and cater for the family. The society is made in such a way that superstition prevails at each level of the

society. Widows are victims of ill-cultural practices and norms as delineated in the character of Yaremi and her other three widows.

Once a woman loses her husband, she is subjected to every kind of false accusations. A woman who loses her husband is automatically deemed as being at the source of her husband's death. Yaremi, a widow and a protagonist from this novel, undergoes the same situation of humiliation and rejection at the death of her husband Ajumobi. The narrator in the following bemoans that:

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)

This passage shows how society becomes hostile to Yaremi when she lost her husband Ajumobi. At this very moment, Yaremi being in a mournful moment should have received a moral support from her society but it has not been the case. It is awful to notice that Yaremi's environment turns to despise her. She is denied her rightful inheritance by her in-laws and rejected by her society on the basis of false accusations. Some of the relatives of her late husband accuse her of being the one who killed Ajumobi, her husband, in spite of her innocence. Reiterating the widows' predicaments in African society, Teddy Kuyela as quoted by Eunice Ngongkum observes that:

In most of the African society, widowhood represents a 'social death' for women. It is not just that they have lost their husbands, the breadwinner and supporter of their children, but widowhood robs them of their status and confines them to the fringes of society where they suffer discrimination and stigma. [...] Widows are generally trodden upon, poor and least protected as their lives are determined by local, patriarchal interpretations of tradition, discrimination and stigma.

(T. Kuyela, 2014, p.140)

Teddy in this extract sheds light on the various predicaments of Nigerian widows as a result of the patriarchal assumptions governing Nigerian society. Widows suffer from stigma and repression. They are targets of repression and hostility, forever leading a life of aloofness, subdued and humiliated. Widows' rights are trampled upon by the custodian of tradition (A. Skyere, 2014, p.390). In Bayo's fictional society, the four widows are dehumanized, discriminated against and isolated from the society. In *Lonely Days*, the narrator reinforces this

idea of widows' isolation when he says: "Yaremi felt thoroughly abandoned, like a stone at the bottom of a lake" (*LD*, p.3). In addition to this abandonment, Yaremi's suffering continues increasing in the hands of people who were supposed to comfort her. Yaremi also suffers from the mockery of the members of her family, "after a few days, the extended family's mockery heaped on her like the strange showers of a January rain...And now, loneliness.... Yaremi's days dragged lazily on, in a haze of solitude and lonesomeness" (*LD*, p.4). Yaremi has been treated like a pariah because as the tradition advocates, she is suspected of being the one who kills her husband. All this increases her suffering. Like other widows, Yaremi mourns every night on her bed. The pressure coming from her society traumatized her to the extent that she is totally lost. Apart from her rejection by her in-law family, the society imposes on her a certain number of treatments which affect her psychologically. Rose Acholonu in her work devoted to "Women in the African Novel and the Quest for Human Rights" shed light on the predicaments of Widows in African society. Eunice Ngongkum, quoting Rose Acholonu observes that "widows are subjected to a whole gamut of obnoxious widowhood rites aimed at making her die within the mourning period about one year. Most brothers-in-law are ever ready to disinherit her and [...] drive her out of her marital home" (E. Ngongkum, 2016, p.140). Yaremi suffered innocently in the hands of the family members of her deceased husband. Olugunle Wole as quoted by Sidi Chabi Moussa also deplors the maltreatments Yaremi is subjected to at the death of her deceased husband, Ajumobi in the following lines:

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 [...].

(S. C. Moussa, 2020, p.9)

Though Ajumobi's death occurred in clear circumstances, this does not prevent his family members from accusing this sorrowful and vulnerable widow. Yaremi recognizes that her late husband lived like a man and died like a man. Living and dying like a man simply means that nobody is at the source of Ajumobi's death, yet his family members falsely accuse Yaremi of being the one who killed him. Yaremi's case is similar to what most widows endure in African societies at the death of their husbands. Widows in Nigerian societies are defenseless and vulnerable due to how society maltreats them. Women in African society are meant to suffer a stressful situation when their husbands die. This

stressful situation makes African women suffer a lot of emotional, physical, mental and spiritual problems (L. O. Eboh and T. E. Boye, 2005, p.1). Apart from Yaremi, three other widows also underwent the same maltreatment. It is the case of Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke, these three widows' living conditions are unbearable. These widows have been separated from the society because of their status of widows. They are being discriminated against and subjected to inhuman treatments as the narrator substantiates: "Our hairs are matted and unkempt", they began. No necklaces and no earrings. The world looks at our elongated necks and chuckles. We are the subjugated people of the world with no hope and no security. We tread the path of life carefully, warily. And followed, all the time, with suspicious gaze" (*LD*, p.22). These three widows recognize their sorrowful states but they have no power to change this unbearable condition they are passing through. These widows belong to a society dominated by men who are so rooted in tradition that whoever goes against their traditions and customs should be punished. When a man loses his wife, there is no problem but when a woman loses her husband, she must be accused of being responsible for the death of her man. Apart from this false accusation, the society will force her to wear a certain garment that will differentiate her from the other women. Bayo has his narrator utter the following "one can't really dance well wearing this kind of garment," one of the widows had observed. This garment which sticks stubbornly to the body, like the ragged robes of a disgraced masquerade" (*LD*, p.24). This depicts the physical appearance of the type of garment these widows are obliged to wear. One of the widows continues narrating the weird and awkward maltreatments imposed upon them by their society "several times, I had been trailed to the farm in this ghostly garment by the village dogs" (*LD*, p.24). Comparing her robe to a ghostly garment shows the type of robe the society has imposed on widows in the society of Kufi.

The discrimination and humiliation of these widows of Kufi steadily continue. They have also been accused of being responsible for their respective husbands' deaths though they are innocent. The novelist in the following passages describes the horrible conditions of the three widows. Dedewe, one of the three widows expresses her humiliation by crying all the night brooding over the humiliation she suffered in the hands of her husband's relatives in the following: "When her husband died, they had sat her down alone by the side of his corpse which lays on a wooden slab in the inner apartment of a dark room, and had asked her to confess her sins. Confess, confess, confess, they had told her. Ask your husband to have mercy. Kneel down and beg him for forgiveness" (*LD*, p.25). This passage clearly explicates the suffering that the late Ajumobi's relatives inflicted on the poor Dedewe. In his study, Olugunle observes that "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" (O. Wole, 2018, p.10). Olungunle's thought reinforces Adebowale's view on the maltreatment perpetrated to widows in African society. Dedewe's case confirms this type of suffering she endures in the hands of her deceased husband's relatives. Much pressure on the poor Dedewe bamboozled her psychologically. Dedewe has been accused of the death of her husband. She has been negatively affected by the maltreatment she was obliged to endure. This maltreatment is inflicted on Dedewe without minding her health. Adebowale deplors this inhuman treatment Dedewe has been subjected to when the narrator has it that "They have locked Dedewe up with the corpse of her husband inside the dimly-lit room. Her wailing was monotonous, long-drawn and heart-rending." (*LD*, p.26). A thorough analysis of the condition undergone by Dedewe shows the extent to which her health was threatened. L. O. Eboh and T. E Boye share the same view when they have it that "Health involves ability to function physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially in an environment African widows do not enjoy the best of health due to pressure of conforming to widowhood practice. A lot of sanctions placed on widow by the society make it difficult for women to express their view point in widowhood" (L. O. Eboh and T. E Boye, 2005, p.1). Eboh's and Boye's assertions help understand clearly the weight of tradition on widows in most African societies. This weight of tradition constitutes hindrances to widows' development.

Fayoyin is the second widow who also endures the same hardships as the previous widows already mentioned. Fayoyin like other widows was constrained to cope with the unbearable situations common to widows. Adebowale depicts the difficult situation Fayoyin underwent in the following lines: "Fayoyin, the second widow, was given a libation to lick when her own husband died. They held it firmly to her lips, to purge her all the sins they insisted she too had committed." (*LD*, p.26). This excerpt helps understand the hardship this sorrowful widow endures at the death of her late husband. Moreover, the narrator in the same vein has it that:

The people, out of hatred for her, went beyond the dictates of her culture: they sprinkled cold water on her head, to soften the texture of her hair. A barber was summoned who quickly set to business. The barber propped Fayoyin's head between his thighs, clenched his teeth, and began scraping away with a sharp 'crocodile nacet' blade. Cut the hair down to the roots," they had told the barber (*LD*, p.27)

The aforementioned passage depicts the physical pains Fayoyin endures in the hands of the barber. Analyzing the narrator's words, one can see that in addition to the fact that African culture is radical, people of Kufi went beyond the dictates of that culture. Afrifa Skyere largely sheds light on the weight of tradition. The author, Bayo Adebowale has resorted to symbolism in his denunciation of the prejudices the various widows suffer in their societies. The road of life as it appears in the novel can stand for the hardships of the widows that have become the common food in the village of Kufi. The road, describing the hardship like privation, lack, poverty, destitution and suffering, is slippery and solitary. As for Afrifa, Bayo tells his readers that "these widows were put through humiliation like: sleeping with the dead husband, shaving all the hair of them and making them walk bare footed and abstain from food" (A. Skyere, 2014, p.396). The road being slippery symbolizes the hardship of these widows. It is not easy to walk on the slippery road and this is the same for the widows in this fictional society. It is very difficult for these widows to cope with the weight of the traditions and customs of their community. They are submitted to a series of rites which turns to dehumanize them and deprives them of their human dignity and rights.

The last widow also undergoes the same maltreatment as the previous widows at the death of her husband. Bayo, through the mouth of his narrator reveals the following "When Radeke's own husband died, she knelt before the dead body, and strings of dirges ran out of her dry throat. Radeke sang the widow's traditional song of innocence and lamentation" (*LD*, p.29). From this extract, one can conclude that all the widows have endured the same maltreatments. From one widow to another, it is observed that their plight exacerbated because of the excessive zeal of some people who go beyond the traditional dictates. Widowhood as depicted in the novel captures easily the attention of any keen reader interested in women's issues. The widows in Bayo's novel are subjected to pain and humiliation. The widowhood as experienced by Yaremi, Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke is a microcosm of the plight of widows in the larger Nigerian society and in the African continent as a whole. Apart from the different widowhood rites imposed upon widows, marriage is another burden dehumanizing women in traditional African society.

2- Marriage as a Social Burden to Women in *Lonely Days*

Paul Friedman defines marriage as "the committed union between two souls who wish to live in love, joy, and happiness to the end of their lives, learning how to love each other

unconditionally" (<http://www.academicjournals.org/jphe>). From this definition, it is clear that marriage is a committed union between two persons and this commitment is based upon love. Contrary to this definition, one can observe that in Bayo Adebowale's fictional world, marriage has another essence and meaning. Marriage as it appears in this village of Kufi is essentially based on patriarchal assumptions. Only men's interests are taken into account and women are supposed to be the executors of the men's decisions. The women in this fictional world are married not out of love but because of the traditional dictates. They are bound to marry in order to be in compliance with the traditional views upon marriage. Olugunle Wole considers such union as forced marriage and a forced marriage is the one in which women are compelled to marry without their consent. He overtly says that:

Similarly, in *Lonely Days*, there are instances of forced marriage. After the death of the initial husbands of these three senior widows; Dedewe, Fafoyin and Radeke, through the event of cap-picking, were forced to remarry to another man. Even when it is not their wish or on the basis of love to get married to them but in their quick readjustment and embracement of the demands of tradition.

(O. Wole, p.9)

The foregoing excerpt highlights this issue of forced marriage and by extinction marriage without the agreement of the two partners. In this kind of marriage, only women become the means of satisfaction. This has been the case of Yaremi's two daughters. They have been married without the consent of their unique parent who is Yaremi after the death of her husband Ajumobi. This situation has deteriorated Yaremi's state and has increased her hardship and her loneliness. The narrator in the following lines says: "Yaremi's two daughters, who used to keep her company, had long been given in marriage. Segi to Wande,...Wura to the blacksmith at Apon" (*LD*, p.4). This quotation corroborates the view according to which marriage as occurred in this novel is not based on love. The same treatment has been inflicted on the four widows in the novel understudy. After the death of their respective husbands, they have been forced to remarry the relatives of their deceased husbands in accordance with the tradition prevailing in that milieu. Analyzing the same issue, Afrifa Sekyere reiterates this aspect in the following "Most times, many of them find themselves sat the mercy of their dead husbands' relatives, many of whom may want them as a second wife" (A. Skyere, p.410). Society is made in such a way that women think they could do nothing without their men. Women consider their husbands as earthly gods and this pushes them to worship their men as if without these men, they could not live. The narrator in the following lines utters that "Yaremi

and other village women used to chuckle as they listened to their boastful husbands. And they always wondered why men were so superb, and so magnificent, so splendid and so audacious.... Men must be special creatures" (*LD*, p.54). This way of doing contributes to the supremacy of men who see themselves as superior to their wives. This is how African societies are established in which men are privileged whereas women are used as a means of satisfaction.

The plights and the predicaments of women in Kufi village are of different shapes. Apart from the mental and the psychological sufferings, women in Kufi village are subjected to physical violence. Beating a wife is considered as a normal thing and Yaremi and her co-widows have experienced it on many occasions. The writer in the following passage highlights this issue through the mouth of the narrator: "In Kufi, wife beating was common. It provided an outlet for husbands' sense of powerlessness and frustration, in the face of grinding poverty. On a couple of occasions, Ajumobi had actually beaten Yaremi and Yaremi had always wondered who on earth, bestowed this right on her husband" (*LD*, p.63). This passage shows how Yaremi suffered in the hands of her late husband. Wife beating becomes normal and a means of expressing men's power and superiority over their wives. Kufi's people are those who are firmly attached to their tradition and they are so faithful to it that at times they overdo and exaggerate. African women most of the time suffer in their marital life. Marriage becomes a social burden upon these innocent women. They are viewed as objects of satisfaction and can be beaten at any time it pleases their husbands. The narrator in Bayo's novel confirms this fact in the following word "While other husbands in the village were busy imposing themselves on their wives and molesting them, Ajumobi..." (*LD*, p.119). Sidi Chabi in his article on this issue unequivocally expresses his condemnation of marriage being a burden to women. Quoting Binwell Sinyangwe, Sidi Chabi has it that "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" (S. Chabi, p.17, 2020). From this, one can easily understand Nasula's total rejection of the marriage she deems as a social burden to women. Nasula has been victim of marital life and she has decided to help her daughter Sula be spared from this suffering. Tradition and culture become hindrances to women's development. Tradition and culture enslave African women and make them believe that without men, they could do nothing. The three widows corroborate this aspect on the occasion of their visit to Yaremi. These three widows vainly attempted to convince Yaremi to remarry after the death of her husband Ajumobi. In the view of these widows, a woman is nothing without a man by her side. In this perspective, the narrator says that "No woman's life is completed

without a man to prop her on in the arduous journey of this world" (*LD*, p.111). From this excerpt, one can easily understand that in Kufi, most women think that without men they can do nothing. This way of thinking contributes to deteriorating women's miserable conditions and at the same time, it increases men's chauvinistic behaviours.

Lanwa, the half brother of the late Ajumobi in a discussion with Yaremi, overtly expresses this superiority men have over women while he was about to convince her to remarry him. For Lanwa, there is no taboo in marrying other women in addition to those he has. He avers that: "The next harvest season is now approaching! I surely will have the means to marry two or three more wives if I like-in addition to taking you over, Yaremi... I hope you don't forget, Yaremi, that the custom of the land is on my side. I am Ajumobi's half brother and so, fully entitled to a fair share of his properties, both human and material" (*LD*, p.97). This quotation reinforces the idea according to which wives become their husbands' properties. Yaremi is considered as her late husband's property and even after his death, Lanwa thinks he does not need Yaremi's point of view. This inhuman treatment inflicted on women in this fictional Kufi village has become a driving force for their self-reliance and self-definition.

3- The Aesthetics of Survival and Self-Definition in *Lonely Days*

Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days* is a novel in which subjugated women are mobilized to revolt against the patriarchal thrusts and to find a space for themselves. The revolutionary temper of the women in the novel is galvanized by the acute rejection and the inhuman treatment the society has inflicted on the four widows in the novel. The novelist artistically challenges the traditional assumptions according to which man is superior to woman. The same issue has been discussed by Afrifa Sekyere. He posits that: "The novel is challenging the idea that men are superior to their female counterparts. The author uses Yaremi to drive home this point. Yaremi has gradually maneuvered her way into a position of reckoning in the village affairs, spreading her influence, and asserting her personality in pleasant, subtle ways" (A. Sekyere, 2014, p.412). From this, it appears that Bayo uses this novel as a means of denunciation of male chauvinistic attitudes and by the way, a means to help women find their own voices. Yaremi after analyzing the cruel suffering of the three widows realizes that the respect of traditional assumptions and the silence are no more tenable. She decided to challenge the various injunctions from her society. The narrator in the following lines reckons that "can you not hear me groan? I think you have become a man. You are a man, Yaremi" (*LD*, p.99). This quotation shows how Yaremi's gait has

drastically thwarted from voiceless to voiced woman. Contrary to the other three widows who accept to remarry at the end of their widowhood rites, Yaremi has refused to follow the traditional ways of viewing the world. All the attempts coming from men have been unsuccessful. Yaremi has refused all the pressures from the society. The following conversation between Yaremi and Ayanwale testifies it "Your talking drum cannot charm me. My waist is now stiff. It cannot be ignited by the clumsy rhythm of your *kongo*. If you don't leave me alone, Ayanwale, your *kongo* will break" (*LD*, p.100). Bayo Adebowale uses this novel to redirect the minds of many Africans who think that women should always accept whatever comes from their men. Maina Ouarodima shares the same vision when he says that "In a patriarchal society, the role of literature by women is not only to inform but also to persuade by redirecting the minds of all those who nourish patriarchal ideologies into a positive consideration of women" (M. Ouarodima, 2020, p.4). It is clear that Bayo uses this novel to inform and to persuade as well as to redirect toward the revalorization of the female gender in this modern time.

Yaremi becomes the assertive woman who thinks that the remarriage is nothing but the double domination of women by their men. Her determination to stand ground to remarriage confers on her the characteristics of a strong and revolutionary woman. She has broken the bondage of tradition and opens to emancipation (Mutunda, 2017, p. 55). In this circumstance Yaremi can be assimilated to Akwenoh, another widow in Nkengasong's *The Widow's Might* who vehemently refuses to remarry the Chief. Eunice Ngongkum in his analysis of Nkengasong's *The Widow's Might* says that "She roundly rejects Pa Ekwe's marriage demand and begins to work out how she will organize her husband's funeral and fare with her children as a widow. "Chief," she said, "as far as marrying you is concerned I will not accept. As for my husband's wealth, I don't know in the first place which wealth you are talking about" (E. Ngongkum, 2020, p.6). This widow has been a courageous one by refusing radically the proposal of a new marriage. Like Yaremi, she becomes conscious that the submission to the patriarchal dictates from the society constitutes a stumbling block to women's development and their visibility. Yaremi took the firm decision to pave the way for her new identity regardless of whatever injunctions coming from her society. She refuses to bow down to the prescriptions of her society and this has resulted in her rejection by the society. She struggled and she acquired a new identity different from that of all the women from Kufi village. Yaremi becomes an autonomous woman admired by women from her society. She has even challenged all those willing to intimidate her. In a conversation with Lanwa, she courageously avers that:

And, by the way, Lanwa, you must stop preaching the sermon of our people's old custom and tradition. This 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 (*LD*, p.103)

The foregoing passage sheds light on the extent to which Yaremi becomes assertive and autonomous fearing no man. Yaremi discovers that she belongs to a society that privileges men. She is conscious that things will not be easy for her but she is determined to make it despite the pressures from her society. She has been rejected by her society because she refused to act in accordance with the expectations of her community. The narrator in the following lines substantiates that "Yaremi's popularity had begun to wane because of her sustained rigidity. She appeared to be fast losing favour with everybody. The people had begun to avoid normal interactions with her" (*LD*, p.117). The quoted passage sheds light on Yaremi's sufferings due to her determination to challenge the patriarchal dogmas dehumanizing women in Kufi's village. She recognizes her predicament, yet she vows not to give up. Through her own voice, Yaremi complains that "All through my predicament in life, I refuse to indulge in useless despair. I just shut away the pain in my heart and forge ahead. I tackle all hibernating problems with fortitude and light mind" (*LD*, p.126). Afrifa Sekyere reinforces this idea of Yaremi's uniqueness and her bravery "Yaremi has learnt to cushion the effects of her situation in life with hard work on the farm and with strenuous has reserved for the business of cooking" (A. Sekyere, 2014, p.390). It is clear from this quotation that one of the secrets of Yaremi is the sense of hard work. She knows that only the hard work can help her overcome men's phallogocentric dominations. To corroborate this assertion, Maina Ouarodima says that "every woman in this world endeavors to achieve happiness and tranquility by struggling day and night to make her dream come true so that she may live beneath its shadow for the rest of her life" (M. Ouarodima, 2020, p.3). From this assertion, it is bold to say that Yaremi's commitment is clear and should be encouraged for the advancement of the female gender in most African societies. It is noticeable that African culture still carries a certain number of practices which hinder the full enjoyment of African women's rights. It becomes urgent to revisit this culture in order to be in compliance with Human Rights agenda. Highlighting the negative side of African culture that marginalizes African women, Rose Acholonu substantiates that:

African culture cannot be allowed to remain static, unprogressive and repressive to womenfolk. Any culture that ceases to grow and change for good, loses its relevance and usefulness to the people and is as good as dead. Ours is a culture in transition and must be purged of all inhuman practices that deny women their rights to full citizens. *Therefore, all harmful traditional beliefs, practices and taboos that militate against women's full enjoyment of their human rights, cannot but be regarded as pollutants that must be flushed out of our cultural system now* (R. Acholonu, 2006, p.262), my emphasis

Here Rose Acholonu once more attacks the barbaric side of African culture that does not contribute to the welfare of women in African societies. This aspect did not escape the critical attention of Bayo Adebowale. In his master piece, the Nigerian writer has Yaremi say that "We developed an open mind and forgave the ignorant ones who humiliated us. We pardoned those who asked the barber to cut our hair to its roots and those who forced us to confess to the sins we did not commit (*LD*, p.111)". From the foregoing excerpt, one can see how Yaremi expresses her total disagreement on some negative and barbaric aspect of African culture. Yaremi has been able to acquire a new identity thanks to her determination and courage she nourished after the humiliation she got from her patriarchal society.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined how widowhood has been articulated in Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*. It has also examined the various plights and predicaments widows are subjected to in African societies and shown how these plights have, to some extent, constituted a driving force for their self-definition and self-actualization. The analysis of data collected shows that the oppression of widows is caused by patriarchal social structures and that the many cruel, obnoxious, discriminatory and inhuman treatments that have been inflicted on widows are worth noticing and have since then been the subject matter of discussions across the board in African societies. These treatments harm and hinder widows' emancipation and self-fulfillment and deprive them as well of their inalienable human rights. The study shows that widows are innocently and falsely accused of being responsible for their husbands' deaths and are for that matter excluded from the management of the properties of their late husbands by greedy in-laws. Furthermore, it is established that marriage has become social burden as they suffer from ill-cultural practices and norms at the death of their partner. Women in Africa suffer in the hands of their men in their households because most African marriages are not based on love. Many sufferings such as

the mental, psychological and physical are inflicted on women in their marital life and denied of their inalienable rights in the hands of their husbands. The results of the analysis show that widows suffer from emotional, psychological and physical abuse, depression and loneliness in the name of cultural and religious practices, beliefs and norms inherent in the community. The findings further indicate that all the sufferings and inhuman treatments inflicted on women have constituted a driving force in their quest for their self-definition and their self-actualization. Yaremi, the protagonist, is a case in point. The study recommends that further research on issues pertaining to women's predicament be the subject matter of other literary texts.

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