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The Representation of Widowerhood in Asare Konadu's *Ordained by the Oracle* (2006)

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Résumé

Le présent article vise à examiner le poids du veuvage sur le veuf en Afrique présenté à travers l'univers imaginaire d'Asare Konadu. La réflexion qui s'appuie sur la sociocritique comme outil méthodologique, révèle qu'il n'y a pas plus de privilèges pour l'homme que pour la femme en ce qui concerne le respect des droits coutumiers. L'étude a montré la mort comme un phénomène auquel hommes et femmes sans distinction de sexe se soumettent et font montre d'une solidarité agissante.

Mots-clés : veuvage masculin, deuil, pesanteur, solidarité communautaire, procession de rituel

Abstract

The present article aims to examine the burden of widowerhood on the widower in the African community of Asare Konadu's created world. Socio-criticism leaning on studies criticism has been used to come up with the contextual result that there is no more privileges for man than woman as far as the respect of customary laws are concerned. The study has shown that death is the device of common fate to which both men and women bow and show solidarity.

Keywords: widowerhood, mourning, weight, communal solidarity, burial procession.

Introduction

The encounter of social and cultural values in a piece of literature prompts every reader to say that a fictional work is the product of socio-cultural experiences of a given society. The writer or the artist has his or her source

of inspiration from the environment where he or she lives. In this respect, Agyekum has socio-critics:

Argue strongly that literary works and social contexts are inseparable. The social milieu is embedded in the works of artists. In effect, the social context serves as the raw material for the production and understanding of literary works. The social set-up and the institutions in the society at any point in time combine to exert some major influence in the works of the artists. (K. Agyekum, 2013, p.219)

From the above statement it clearly brings out that no literary work or production comes out of vacuum. It is always the outcome of the experience of a given society or community. Indeed, concerning the novel which is the core of my study, Asare Konadu draws the narrative from his cultural heritage. The book is an imaginary account of the premature death of Boateng Akwabena's wife, Dora. The latter died from diabetes and must be buried according to the customary rites. Konadu revives the traditional values by showing the strict respect of mourning rituals which are very hard for Boateng the protagonist of the novel. In the corpus, the author spotlights the thorny issue of widowerhood which is rarely addressed by literary artists even the most famous of contemporary African literature simply because of the supremacy of male chauvinism in the African community. What the public opinion knows and very often fights against is the widowhood which concerns only the women who have lost their husbands and who are victim of the traditional harshness. But Konadu dares centre his imaginative work on widowerhood whose mourning ceremony appears very harsh for the widower. Furthermore, in his narrative the writer proves that in Africa the individual is not an isolated being. He or she must feel the warmth of the relatives in case of misfortune such as death. In Africa, consanguinity is the pivotal element that governs the relationships among the individuals. For the death of Dora the relatives come from long distances to attend the burial ceremonies and contribute to expenses of the charges in order to express their compassion and solidarity to bereaved family. It is important to ask some questions to better understand the African realities concerning the myth that surrounds the advent of death in African communities. Why does it import to perform the customary rites when someone dies? What is the weight of these

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rites on the widower? How does the community express its compassion and solidarity to the widower and the bereaved family? What is the impact of these traditional rites both on the widower and the family and the community as whole? All these preoccupations will find their answers in the course of the development of the different aspects of this research work. So, the present work is articulated around three parts. The first part deals with the mourning of death and burial procession, the second one addresses the aesthetics solidarity at widowerhood time and the last part speaks of the decline of male chauvinism in the process of mourning. Sociological criticism and cultural studies criticism have been used to back up arguments in this research work. The study uses the qualitative approach which consists in exploring the existing research works on the topic under reflection.

Mourning of Death and Burial Procession

In most African communities any occurrence of death is a moment of great sorrow and misfortune. The loss of a family or a community member is highly resented because death for them only has mythic and mystic understanding and explanation and it is the will of God. For this reason, it is important that the researcher makes clear the concept of death before seriously addressing its implications in the community. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, (M. Webster, 2011, p. 319) death is “a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life.” In the aftermath of this definition from the dictionary, it appears necessary to explore the existing literatures on the issue for further understanding. In the book titled *West African Traditional Religion* T. Quarcoopome (1987, p.125) writes this about it “death therefore is regarded as a transition from one state of existence to another. It is a passage from this earthly existence to another world.” From this passage, it underscores that death is a shift from a dwelling place to unknown new world. The occurrence of death disturbs the harmony, cohesion, and solidarity in both family and community. For Okeja (2016) (in Mbiti, 2016) death is “that inevitable and, in many societies, most disrupting phenomenon of all. More disturbing is that death knows no boundaries as

anyone regardless of sex, wealth, status, race is not exempted. (E. Chukwuemeka et al., p.3 2018)

Thus, the mystery around the invisible and spiritual dwelling creates an instance of a great fear and psychological disturbance among mankind. This apprehension is observed in Boateng's attitude when his wife Dora was dying at the hospital ward:

‘Please, Lord, Let her get better this time. Troubled and distressed by this affliction, I beseech you Lord to spare her life for me. I know myself how hard it often is to live without her.’ He prayed silently as he waited for the nurse to answer the question. ‘We have had a screen around her because in the night she took a turn for the worse and we thought we should call you,’ she said. But that was not sufficient and he wanted more. ‘Where is she?’ He asked. ‘I said behind the green screen. Come along.’ She beckoned. Boateng hesitated. He held on tightly on the chair next to him and closed his eyes in a final act of prayer. ‘Oh Lord God!’ he began. When he opened his eyes, two tears fell down. They came straight to his mouth and he spat them out forgetting that he was in a hospital. The nurse's call came back to him and he took a few steps towards before her wiping his eyes. Had the end come for Dora? Boateng pulled up his trousers, tightened his belt and followed her. ‘If she died,’ he thought, ‘who would look after the children, who would look after the house and my things and my money. (A. Konadu, 2006 p. 8-9)

Though the long above quote describes the protagonist's behaviours in time of despair, it highlights the qualities of the agonising wife. This equally puts into relief the hypocritical nature of human beings who only praise or recognise their alter ego's qualities in time of agony or when they pass away. In the created African community the reality is that people seem to value the deceased more than the living. It appears in the context that Dora the agonising wife causes to Boateng much emotional suffering which affects state of being. This emotional pain lies in the fact that no single partner can seriously take care of the children and ensure their education. Altogether, the loss a partner creates a great economic disequilibrium the family. At the level of love, the departed person provokes an enormous trauma with living partner because he or she can no more start a new marriage life. If this is to happen it would be very hard even sometimes impossible for certain persons. .

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Despite the endeavours of the hospital agents and the assistance of the members of the community in which she lives, Dora had died against all expectations. Dora's demise is obvious in the following extract:

‘Bring the screen’ the doctor shouted. The aides came rushing forward. The doctor held her hand and wiped his forehead with the other one. ‘Sorry, Mr Boateng.’ ‘Is she dead?’ Boateng asked. There was no answer. That moment the noise of her breath ceased and Dora lay cold on the bed—dead. (A. Konadu, 2006 p. 18)

In Africa, when a community member passes away he or she deserves due customary rites in order to allow him or her to break definitively with the living world and enter the world of spirits or ancestors forever. In this perspective, the burial rites are to be performed to pay tribute to the deceased. These ceremonies permit the widow or the widower to bid farewell to his or her departed husband or wife. Indeed, as a widower, Boateng worries about the mourning period of his departed wife because it is thought to be tough and unbearable. This instance is witnessed in the instructions and warning that the custodian old woman utters at the beginning of the mourning rituals:

Madam Kai came and stood by him. ‘The death came suddenly and it is important in the interest of your own safety to fight her spirit away so that it will never return for any further communion with you. So don't take anything we ask you lightly. ‘Follow each act in detail and see to it that you do not violate declared as taboos while the mourning period of forty days lasts. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.65)

In addition to these instructions and warning, the narrator sheds light on the importance of the mourning rituals. It is to cancel the existing relationship between Boateng and his deceased wife. The significance of mourning appears also in Evans-Pritchard's very direct statements which imply:

If African societies evolved elaborate and complex rituals to manage death, this was because, for them too, death provoked fear and revulsion and posed a problem for the living. The ultimate purpose of mortuary customs was to allow the living to get on with living. And in order for this to be achieved, there was no short-cutting the work of mourning. To simplify, the dead could only find their place as ancestors, rather than vengeful ghosts, if their loss had been properly registered, not only by the individuals closest to them, but

by the social groups of which they were members. (R. Lee et al, 2008, p.2)

In this regard, the precepts that will govern the protagonist attitude are summarised in four main points:

You must not eat anything while the sun has not set and not more than once a day.

You must not eat anything growing underground and these include, cassava, yam, cocoyam.

During the mourning period of forty days this should be your dress. (They thrust at him a mourning black cloth called kuntunkuni.)

You will be provided with a guide for that period and he will accompany you everywhere you go. You will eat when he eats and you will sleep when he sleeps. In other words he will guide you in all that you must do. (Konadu, 2006: 67)

What is very interesting in this passage is that though these rules are severe and inevitable they are designed for a man. It is unbelievable that in African community man is submitted to this sort of rituals. This is an instance to strongly deny the public opinion which asserts that in Africa the mourning rituals are for widows only. This illustration shows that though most of African communities are patriarchal, the traditional laws and rules are designed for everyone and must be accepted by every member of the community. Furthermore, mourning rituals serve as bridge between the living and the dead, preserve and assure the continuity of customary heritage, establish and reinforce the philosophical and ideological orientations of the community. Lee and Vaughan confirm this African truth in their research work as follows:

It is not difficult to see why colonial anthropologists viewed the management of death as fundamental to understanding the social fabric and belief systems of 'traditional' societies. Funerary and mourning practices express and shape a wide range of social relations, including the maintenance of kinship ties, the reproduction of communal values, and notions of succession and property inheritance. Because they attempt to mediate between the world of the living and the world of the dead, mortuary rituals also reveal a society's spiritual and philosophical orientation. (R. Lee et al, 2008, p.19)

This quote stresses the importance of funerary and mourning practices as kinship ties and an instance of mediation between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In the same line, Vincent Brown in his paper “The Reaper’s Garden: Death and power in the World of Atlantic slavery” underscores the strong belief of West African people in the mourning rituals. Here he quotes Sir Hans Sloane, the author of *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London: printed by B.M. for the author, 1707), describes the elaborately staged and mournful funeral rites at Africans’ burials. West Africans, he wrote, “believed that their ancestors would protect them from the other world; hence it was essential to honor the dead in the best way possible”(V. Brown, 2008,p.1.)

Thus, the fear of the unknown world of the spirits and the hope to be protected by their ancestors compel the custodian authorities of Asamang to organize mournful ceremony without default by respecting strictly the different stages of the traditional instructions. In this passage the narrator shows an illustration of the ritual performance:

Pots of herbs were brought in and some of their waters poured into earthenware pot. ‘Strip your clothes and have your bath,’ he was asked. ‘These leaves will prevent your wife’s spirit following you.’ (...) ‘Now here is your towel,’ the woman handed it over him. It was the stuff beaten from a bunch of plantain, and the fibre coarse and slippery, with the juice still fresh, absorbed the water and boiled leaves rather slowly leaving beads of perspiration on him. When it was all over he smelt of cinnamon and neem. The Kuntunkuni cloth which was from now on to become his clothing was given to him but not before they had strung and put round his waist a brass padlock, the red feather of a parrot and the claws of chameleon. And he was now prepared to face the body of his wife. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.67)

From the foregoing quotation, this ritual is performed to prevent Boateng’s wife’s from wandering spirit to attack and harm him. It is also proved that the Africans are still attached to their ancestral beliefs. Another customary rite is performed to interrupt the existing relationship between Boateng and his wife from now on spirit and implore the spirit to cover him and his children with blessings:

He poured the first drops of the bottle down and said in a shaky voice: 'Dora Serwaah' (for that was Dora's maiden name and he thought she should listen to him in that name better in her other name), daughter of the great farmer of Ashanti. Come and drink from my hand today. I call you not out of happiness but out of sorrow. Tonight I stand here a pitiful figure because you have left us in this world without any care and provision. If you died no natural death but someone sought to cut your life short on this earth, seek for revenge. He had poured about half of the bottle on the floor now. He weighed again the last sentence as he looked at the schnapps flowing near his feet. He knew he had done a lot things which Dora didn't like and if she attacked him what would he do? So he began the next sentence. 'I am exempted of course. As you know it is the stones to each other that rub. Bless your children and me and give us long life and do not let any mishap come our way. Now I say good-bye with this handkerchief. The money here is your fare to Nsamansie and the cowries for Amokyi. If there was any marriage we contracted on earth, it is all over and I give you your freedom' (A. Konadu, 2006, p.83-85)

Moreover, the excerpt spotlights Boateng's wishes and plea for repentance and forgiveness for his misconduct toward her in her life existence. He also asks for revenge if her death does sound natural. Such a request for vengeance poses the question of the cause of death in Africa. No death is natural in Africa. Every demise in Africa is human's machination and the narrator states crystal clear in "we have never known disgrace in our family. We know yours is a journey of no return but should we be denied the reason of your departure from us? No. that is why we ask tonight: let us know who sent you on your journey before your time." (A. Konadu, 2006, p.181)

Since the departed person becomes invisible spirit and can strike every time if any shortcutting happens in the burial process the latter is done with fear and great care. In addition to all this, African people believe in hereafter and Quarcoopome addresses this African view in the paragraph below:

Great care is taken in burying the dead. There are elaborate funeral rites and ceremonies which reinforce the belief that death is only a transition and therefore that there is life after death. Depending on the status of the deceased, there may be drumming, dancing, firing of muskets and guns and the pouring of libation as part of the funeral rites. Messages are given to the deceased to be delivered to past

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relatives of the family. Burial follows an elaborate wake-keeping with the deceased lying in state. (T. Quarcoopome, 1987, p.125)

In African social context, burial procession and inhumation of the corpse terminate the burial ceremony. Konadu focuses on this reality here

She had run to get them from her room and now the procession moved and turned towards the cemetery. (...) In the distance, they could hear the chant of the procession entering deep into the wooded cemetery where Dora was being put to rest.” (Konadu, 2006:192-193)

During this period the widower suffers a lot, and indeed Boateng has undergone many sufferings. The writer highlights an instance of these sufferings through this extract

‘it is time now to smash the pot,’ Kofi Amapa said. Boateng raised it from his head and with all the strength let in him smashed the black pot in the centre of the path. As he let it go, he could feel the brass padlock dangling from his waist. ‘Turn quickly and run,’ Kofi Amapa said.” (A. Konadu, 2006, p.193)

What surprises the ordinary man in this study is that the mourning ceremony is undergone by a man not by a woman. This is very rare in African communities. Even though a man loses his spouse he is not compelled to respect strictly and rigorously all the stages of the mourning rituals because the performance of rituals at some points creates the feeling of great fear in the widower that removes from him his male chauvinist. Very often the custodian authorities arrange things and some shortcutting is observed so as to spare him from the cruelty and the harshness of the mourning. This dominant attitude of masculinity is better apprehended through the excerpt from Kate M. Bennett’s research work on the topic “No Sissy Stuff”: Towards a theory of masculinity and emotional expression in older widow men.”

I argue that, whilst the emotional consequences of widowhood provide a challenge to conventional views of what it is to be a manly man, widowers negotiate those emotions in ways that, to their mind, will preserve their masculinity. That negotiation takes place in speech; men discuss their experiences using rhetorical devices through which the emotional content of the story is expressed in the language of control, rationality, responsibility and success. This

negotiation responds to the contextual framework of time and place, which includes the 31 public versus private domain, culture, generation and cohort.(K. M. Bennett, 2007, p.1)

The passage above explains clearly the vulnerability of the widower during the execution of the customary rites. The bereavement rituals affect their masculinity. If during the ceremony they express emotion in public, they are no more powerful but powerless. Though Boateng does not negotiate a shortcutting, he is psychologically affected by the harshness of the rites.

Contrarily to this prevailing opinion about the performance of the widowerhood, Boateng has thoroughly gone through all the mourning rituals as required by customary tradition. Apart from the anthropologists who had carried out the field investigation on widowerhood, in fictional work it is almost still a virgin terrain so far. Hence, the study on widowerhood deserves to be conducted. Considering the efforts that mourning ceremony requires, it will be huge burden for a sole individual to bear all expenses alone. This is the reason why the community of Asamang spontaneously gather when death has struck Boateng's wife and offer human, moral, material and financial assistances.

The Aesthetics of Solidarity at Widowerhood Time.

In Africa, no community member can live in margin or isolated from the society. The community or the society protects and assists its members in time of disgrace and misfortune. Society guarantees social security and offers assistance to its inhabitants. This vital warmth is organised in the crucible of solidarity that connects every member of the society in time of need. Since solidarity epitomizes African people it is then important to coin the concept for further understanding. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* solidarity is "Unity, agreement and support resulting from shared interests, feelings, actions, sympathies, etc." (J. Crowther, 1996, p. 1131). This definition succinctly bears the characteristics of life in community. One of the most pivotal values of the African society is its solidarity. It reinforces the ties among human beings in the society. It serves as traditional social

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security system that brings together the relatives of the extended family. The writer depicts the atmosphere of solidarity in the second chapter of the novel when Dora passed away at the hospital ward. The narrator describes this instance of assistance and compassion through the nurse's attitude:

‘Please, Mr Boateng, be calm,’ the nurse said and reaching for his hand. (...) The nurse continued to hold his hand. A second man reached for his left hand and started to talk to him. ‘We know how you feel at this particular moment. It is a terrible moment in man's life when his best companion in life leaves him,’ the first nurse started. ‘Please be calm,’ the other joined. ‘It is a situation which shall pass away one time or another and then you start living again.’ (A. Konadu, 2006, p.23).

Just after the community had received the news of Dora's death the relatives and traditional custodians gathered and started planning the performance of the mourning ceremony for their son Boateng. As the ceremony is complex, he needs to be coached accompanied in the course of the different rites. This explains the heavy presence of the relatives in Boateng's compound awaiting the arrival of the widower. The narrator informs the readers about:

The others looked on to the room where the bed was being prepared for the dead body. Her face and the faces of the others were grief itself, portraying in every detail how they had taken the death of Dora. ‘Where is the husband?’ madam Kai asked. ‘I understand he hasn't arrived. He was left behind in the hospital,’ another woman sitting next to Madam Kai She was Madam Antwiwaa who was not only the custodian of the sacred grove of Apontua but the goddess herself. In this position she was the highest authorities who were normally consulted on occasions when grief struck the village. (A.Konadu, 2006, p.34-35)

The passage also describes the hierarchical organisation setup and announces the solemnity of the event. Death occurrence in Africa gathers relatives even from the extended family coming from everywhere to mourn the deceased of their community. This sign of fraternity and solidarity is depicted in the quote below:

When Madam Dora Boateng died everybody at Asamang and the outlying district came to the funeral, not only the love and respect they had for her and her family but to mourn with her husband

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Kwabena Boateng in that hour of tribulation . It was customary that when anybody died all the people of Asamang joined the bereaved family to bury the dead and share the funeral expenses, which sometimes stood very high because many kinds of drinks were served and many people were invited from all parts of the country and they came with traditional drums and played them until the dead was buried and all the ceremonies were carried out. These lasted for forty days and nights. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.23)

From the aforementioned quotation one understands clearly that in traditional Africa no one carries burden alone. Moments of joy and sorrow are shared jointly in the community. This ideology of solidarity which maintains the bond among Africans is the fitting solution to prevailing poverty. If only the African Heads of State can include this existing African strategic solution for the reduction of poverty at the State level, it will be a messianic remedy for the development of the continent. Indeed, solidarity will create the unity of the African nations and foster the emancipation of the continent. Through solidarity in times of unhappiness the Africans reaffirm their membership to the community and recover their cultural identity. In the same regard Marleen De Witte thinks that

A death in the family is the occasion for members of the ‘abusua’ who have dispersed all over Ghana and abroad to come home and share their emotions and the organisation and financing of the funeral. This strengthens and expresses the sense of communality and mutual dependence. (de Witte, 2003)

As it is stated previously the cost mourning funeral is very high so that nobody can afford it alone in the community. But owing to the individual contribution, the mourning and the burial funeral are performed. And this reality is illustrated in this passage

The market-place was a crowded arena. Again it was beginning to look like the festival. The people came with drinks for the dead and donations of money to help the mourners pay their expenses. (...) Like the festivals, that was the way the people helped the bereaved family to pay off the debt incurred. ” (A. Konadu, 2006, p. 206 & 209).

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All this proves that in Africa the individual has value only within his community and depends on the latter. The society creates its own norms to satisfy its members in times of needs. The former never stays behind when the individual undergoes sorrow and misfortune. This communality indicates the idea of shared prosperity among the African people.

Conversely, this African traditional heritage that constitutes a sign of fraternity and love for the bereaved family is progressively perverted and turned into business. Marleen De Witte satirises this social misconduct as follows:

Fulfilling social obligations and expectations to ensure the success of one's own or one's relative's future funeral is therefore an important motive for attending funerals in the community. Funerals, as the primary social events, are about creating, maintaining, and strengthening relationships. As Arhin (1994: 318) puts it: 'The public aspects of funeral rites are a substitute for the parties of business men.' In a society where many things in life are organised through informal networks, it is not surprising that investment in social relations is high. Money is the social binding agent in reciprocal relationships. Money that circulates is not only the glue that binds two people—the donor and the recipient—but the whole community. By publicly giving money one takes part in the system of money circulation and so legitimises one's place in the community. (M. de Witte, 2003, p.10)

From this quotation it crystal clear appears that people donate at funeral ceremony on purpose. They take advantage from the money they give publically. This practice helps to seal a relationship not only between the donor and the recipient but closes the gaps between the donor and the whole community. In addition, the donors use money during the funeral ceremonies to construct and reconstruct their social, economic and political stand.

With the advent of the technologies, African people use the media to collect money and wherewithal in order to plan a huge bereavement funeral and sometimes organisers of the ceremony spare money and materials for personal use. On the same ground, the narrator highlights this unorthodox practice "I am taking this to share with friends who will help me to do the work" (Konadu, 2006:266-267) Altogether sometimes dispute rises among the

organisers about the account they give of items and money they collected from solidarity. Konadu makes obvious this dissention between Dora's patriclan, Boateng and his relatives. Here is the account of it.

Kofi Amapa rose and with a little notebook in his hand announced that they had spent three hundred pounds and received donations of one hundred pounds. 'That is not acceptable to us,' an elder of Dora's patriclan said. Why not? Boateng asked. At the beginning we asked you to join us so that there would be only one account.' 'All right, we shall pay our debt and you pay yours. Kofi, let's go' Boateng said. They rose but were persuaded to sit down and they then started the adjustments. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.267-268)

This state of affairs debases this African traditional solidarity and people start questioning the social worth of these mourning practices which enabled poor families in the old times to get contributions from the extended family and people of good wills and reduce the burden of payment of the mourning debts. Therefore, this behaviour leads to laziness. The mourning ceremony has not been performed in Konadu's fictional work without repercussion on the widower and the community as whole.

The Decline of Male Chauvinism in the Process of Mourning

The effect of mourning in the present study is two-fold. First of all, it is perceived through the behaviour of the widower just after the death of his wife then during the mourning rituals. When, in the life of a couple, a partner passes away it seriously affects the one who is still alive. It is a crucial moment in a life of an individual which can lead to multiple developments. So, the announcement of the death of a beloved is always great shock that affects the whole being of the person. At the hospital ward when Boateng, the main character of the novel receives the news of the death of his wife Dora, he is disagreeably surprised and feels almost psychologically disturbed. Though he knows that the Dora's suffering is serious and she is nearly agonising, Boateng is not ready to face the reality of the death of his wife. Here the narrator exposes the very reactions of Boateng after Dora's death:

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Boateng pushed his way through the screen, lifting the plastic curtain before him, and entered. The force was so great that it took the curtain off its rails. But he did not want it. He clashed the curtain against the flanks and the bottles that stood on the locker by the bed. It knocked them over, crashing the flasks down on the terrazzo floor. Many other things followed as the rails followed the curtain down. Again he came face to face with Dora. Her eyes were closed and the nurses were tidying the bedclothes about her. Boateng made for her hand and shouted 'Dora, Dora'; she did not open her eyes. 'Oh Dora, oh Dora,' he cried, kneeling in front of the bed. 'Oh Lord God, you give power to the medicine man and power to the kings. Each is distinct and never merging. The adventure ahead requires a quality, as valourous as audacious, to attend and glorify the dead. I wish to demur and not demise and if it pleases you and I trust it does...' He started aloud. He asked God to help him to take his life and die instead of living in this of woe. 'Oh God, make me a man fit for this challenge,' he concluded. Because he would be dead just as Dora had died and both of them would lie side by side in the same tomb taking in their arms the whole of heavenly kingdom, if ever there was such a place as the Christians said. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.20-21)

The excerpt describes a great confuse from Boateng. He is psychologically perturbed. He loses hope and even wishes the Almighty God terminated his existence. This really proves that Boateng is on the shock. He expresses publically his emotions what is not of good point for a man in African tradition. This state of being affects his masculinity and weakens his authority in the community. It does not just stop at this mental confusion and derangement if the person in question is not guided and coached. Sometimes the behaviour of the person nearly develops into madness. And this is noted in Boateng's new condition just after he has unconsciously left the hospital ward. About this disastrous state of being, the writer portrays:

As he backed from the square concrete encircling the stand he stumble into a man coming to drink. 'Why, my friend,' the man asked definitely annoyed at the knock Boateng had given his head. He stretched up. 'Sorry,' Boateng said. The man looked at him and somehow decided not to say anything again. But Boateng wanted some form of activity, not only to stimulate him but give him an opportunity for revenge on all humanity. Nobody was fit to live after Dora, and he would have fought that man if he had ventured to say anything more. He got back into the street and walked on away from the crowd, and lorries and cars, the shops and workshops. He was

dazed and saw rather poorly the whole life around him. He walked by side of the road and headed for the area where he saw the tall tree growing. There he expected to have the peace and the serenity to he needed to mourn his wife. He bent his head and walked on. Several lorries passed him and he met several people he felt the passengers in the buses and cars and lorries and the pedestrians were all looking at him and gazing down into his eyes wondering why he walked with a bent head and in black trousers in that part of the city. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.26-27)

This excerpt shows that Boateng is thoroughly driving to despair. He behaves strangely what surprises every passer-by. He becomes even aggressive and very dangerous for the peaceful the community expects. The death of his beloved wife has psychologically affected him. On this ground O'Connor et.al, assert that

The death of a loved one also gives rise to a secondary set of psychosocial circumstances. These include lack of contact with other people, feelings of isolation and a climate of helplessness, feelings of a lack of control and coping, and depression.(Connor et al., 2002)

In this state of mental disorder, Boateng accidentally and haphazardly finds himself in a place which happens to be a bar. There he thinks that he can deny the current reality by refuging himself under drinking alcohol like an addict.

He entered without knowing where he was, and sat down on the first chair available. A young woman in a bright-coloured frock came to him and asked, 'What will you drink?' So this is a bar, he thought, and if drink will take my sorrow away, I shall drink all myself out.' Three tots of whisky and soda,' he said. She might have been surprised as she asked. 'All at once? I mean the whisky.' 'Yes.' When she brought it, Boateng pulled out his purse and paid her, putting on the table a five pound note. 'No change yet. Hold it against further orders. 'Thank you,' she said. He sat down again and started drinking. He swallowed all down in three gulps and put the glass down, belching heavily. 'May I have another?' Three tots? 'Yes, and this time with ginger.' (A. Konadu, 2006, p.28-29)

This Boateng's situation is similar to what the French writer André Malraux describes in his *Condition humaine* (Human condition) where Tchen and Oguazor, both dynamic characters of the novel have refuged under the consumption of opium because they failed to fight successfully the capitalist

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system of Shanghai in the period of Mao Tse Tung revolution of 1949. Sometimes, people think that they can solve life problems by simply becoming addicted to doping with narcotic. Whatever the duration of their addiction whenever they come back to the normal condition they still have to deal with the hard reality of their life problems.

The extract points out the weakness and the irresponsibility of the male gender face to life reality. It clearly states the cowardice of Boateng the protagonist of the novel. He has cheerfully trampled the intrinsic traditional values that govern the African society. He exposes his feelings and emotions. He lacks courage seen his age. A true man from the African traditional society who has gone through initiation must stand ground in front of ups and downs of life. A man cannot despair before the difficulties and problems of life. What has happened today and had never happened before and will not happen tomorrow. A man must hope that things will change for better. He who loses hope loses everything and must disappear. Fortunately, the providence sends him somebody to teach him that the end of a life is the extension of another. Thus, life still goes on and will never stop because of the problems and difficulties. And the hope is brought to him by a curious bar woman who worries for Boateng seen his physical condition. She inquires:

‘What is your name? You don’t look happy,’ she said. ‘Yes? My wife is dead; that is why.’ ‘But you need not be unhappy. There are many women in the world.’ Boateng raised his head and looked at her. (...) But I have also lost my husband three years ago, but you have to forget sometime and start living again. You need someone to give you that new life and I came here to sit down while away the time. (A. Konadu, 2006, p. 29)

Providentially, his best friend Michael Manu has found him in the street totally drunkard and driven him to mortuary house where he is awaited to face the reality of mourning rituals of his departed wife. During the mourning rituals the widower is voided of his acting capability. He is almost infantilised and deprived of his chauvinism. In line with this idea, Kimmel (1994) suggests that the experiences of bereavement further increase the gap between masculine ideal and lived Men's sense of masculinity may be threatened by bereavement with its associated physical and mental health

impacts.(M. Bennett, 2007,p.2) Female gender instructs and governs Boateng. “So, don’t take anything we ask you lightly. ‘Follow each act in detail and see to it that you do not violate any of the things declared as taboos while the mourning period of forty days lasts,’ she said.” (A. Konadu, 2006, p.65). This means that for forty days he is no freer and will receive instructions from the priestess of the Asamang community. He is even appointed “Kofi Amapa, the guide...” (A. Konadu, 2006, p.71) an experienced old widower who follows him up. A feeling of a great fear inhabits him and this is manifested through this passage:

Might be he was suspicious; might be because he was afraid, but in that society of custom and tradition superstition played a part, and coincidence was never ruled out in any act the hands of gods were said to be operating. So he stopped the next step and watch the ceiling. The ceiling continued to crack and little noises seeped through the joints. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.83)

Furthermore, Boateng is so traumatized that at the end of the mourning rites he almost commits a suicide. He is on the verge of hanging himself when he is luckily surprised the hunters returning from hunting. The narrator makes an account of this incident missed which might be unfortunate and disastrous for Boateng

He did all this with his mind focused on the tree in search for a branch low enough to take a rope and his body. There was none nearby and he walked to the next group of orange trees. Boateng heard steps up and the footpath and male voices. (...) He ran as fast as he could and hid behind a mango tree. The people heard the noise and the rustling of the leaves as Boateng ran. They stopped in the path and the first man, who held a gun, fired into the bush where the rustling came from. For the next second they listen. Boateng hiding behind the tree heard the report of the gun and a whistling noise as bullets landed in the tree next to him ‘*Hei eye me, eye me*. Don’t shoot. I am not a beast. I am a human being,’ Boateng shouted. (A. Konadu, 2006, p.252-253)

It clearly appears that mourning ceremony has negatively impacted the widower. Seen all this mess it is important that customary authorities in African tradition introduced reforms in the mourning practices in order to help the widower psychologically to bear the rites and avoid trauma.

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Moreover, the mourning ceremony is disastrous and catastrophic for the economic development of the community. It prevents people from producing economically since it lasts forty days. During mourning period people leave their dwelling place, abandon their economic activities for days. Hence, it appears necessary to introduce reforms in the performance of the customary mourning which will stow with the domination of technology.

Conclusion

This research paper has examined the burden of widowerhood on the widower throughout Asare Konadu's *Ordained by the Oracle* (2006). The analysis has covered three main points of reflection, the mourning of death and burial procession, and the aesthetics of legendary solidarity in the period of widowerhood and the decline in the process of mourning. These points have permitted to put some questions that have guided the analysis. Socio-criticism with an emphasis on cultural studies has been used to clarify the importance of customs and practices related to funeral and mourning activities as ties to the kinship.

The study has made it possible to show in the hostile African patriarchal environment that there is no more privileges for man than woman as far as the respect of customary laws are concerned. Moreover, the study has revealed that the occurrence of the death is an opportunity to swindle relatives. It has also proven the mourning period to be hard for the widower who has to take up new responsibilities in the eternal absence of his wife. The research has equally found that there is a warming and sympathetic moment of solidarity when death strikes a community member. It has revealed that the mourning rites are traumatic and disastrous for a widower, affects and weakens his masculinity. It has concluded that the customary authorities must introduce some reforms in order to lighten the weight of widowerhood and the cost of mourning charges.

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